

a sermon on PSALM 51:17

ON A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART BEFORE THE LORD

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3/09/2007 AD

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I. A PRAYER FOR PENITENCE

“Most merciful GOD, Who art of purer eyes that to behold iniquity, and hat promised forgiveness to all those who confess and forsake their sins; We come before Thee in an humble sense of our own unworthiness, acknowledging our manifold transgressions of Thy righteous Laws. But, O gracious Father, Who desirest not the death of a sinner, look upon us, we beseech Thee, in mercy, and forgive us all our transgressions. Make us deeply sensible of the great evil of them, and work in us an hearty contrition; that we may obtain forgiveness at Thy hands, Who art ever ready to receive humble and penitent sinners; for the sake of Thy Son JESUS CHRIST, our only Saviour and Redeemer. AMEN!”¹

II. A PROPOSITION

The LORD desires the sacrifice of a humble spirit and contrite heart before His Presence!

III. THE TEXT – PSALM 51:17^{2 3}

The sacrifices of GOD are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O GOD, Thou wilt not despise.

זִבְחֵי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נְשֻׁבָּרָה לִב־נִשְׁבָּר וְנִדְכָּה אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִבְזֶה:

IV. INTRODUCTION

PSALM 51:17 in the King James Version English tells us that the sacrifices which GOD delights in are those of a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart, which He will not turn away. This corresponds to PSALM 51:19 in the Hebrew text, of which I offer this transliteration: ZIVCHEY ‘ELOHIYM RUACH NISHBARAH LEV-NISHBAR VENIDKEH ‘ELOHIYM LO’ TIVZEH.⁴ I offer this wooden translation:

¹ 1, Book of Common Prayer, A Prayer for Penitence, page 71.

² 2, KJV, PSALM 51:17.

³ 3, BHS, PSALM 51:19.

⁴ I transliterate the Hebrew letter aleph as ‘ and ayin as “.

“[The] Sacrifices [of] GOD [are] a spirit caused to be broken, a heart caused to be broken and caused to be crushed. GOD not He will hate [these].” The New American Bible version of PSALM 51:19 offers this insightful translation: “My sacrifice, GOD, is a broken spirit; GOD, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart.”⁵

V. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT

Looking at the entirety of PSALM 51, we first see that this is a publicly offered prayer by King David in lament for his sins concerning his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Urriah, which David did in an attempt to cover up his sexual sins with this other man’s wife. PSALM 51 is titled, “<To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.>”⁶ This was a public confession and repentance of King David, the most powerful man in Israel and The LORD’s anointed over His Covenant Nation, before GOD and men. And as Calvin observes, “David represents contrition of heart as comprehending in itself the whole sum of acceptable sacrifices [to GOD].”⁷

Second, the text in PSALM 51 throughout reveals a man in earnest and deep contrition for its sins against GOD and man. This was David, whose spirit was broken and whose heart was broken and crushed, not only by his sins but also by the tragic consequences of his sins for himself and those whom he loved. So David cries out in PSALM 51:1 and 3, “Have mercy upon me, O GOD, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me!”⁸ To understand why David’s soul was broken and his heart broken and crushed, we must briefly visit the causative events of his sins as recorded in II SAMUEL 11 and 12.

⁵ 4, NAB, PSALM 51:19.

⁶ 2, KJV, PSALM 51:1a.

⁷ 5, Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume V, PSALMS 36-92, PSALM LI, 17. The sacrifices of GOD are a broken spirit, page 305.

⁸ 2, KJV, PSALM 51:1b and 3.

VI. PUTTING PSALM 51:17 IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In II SAMUEL 11 we find King David gazing upon a beautiful woman – Bathsheba, the wife of Urriah his servant and servant of Israel who is away fighting for the nation - from his palace bathing on her roof. And lust was kindled in his heart. Verses 4 to 5 tell us that "...David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her... and she returned unto her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child!"⁹

Now David schemes to cover up his first sins with Bathsheba by having her husband Urriah recalled back to Jerusalem and, feigning brotherly friendship and comradeship with him in his palace, attempts to convince Urriah to go into his wife Bathsheba. This, so as to make Urriah think that he is the father of the as yet unborn child. But Urriah refuses to take such comfort as a loyal servant of The LORD, the nation and David! So he rebuffs the king in verse 11, "And Urriah said unto David, The Ark [of The Covenant of The LORD], and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing!"¹⁰

David tries again the next day after plying Urriah with wine and revelry into the night. But again Urriah - this faithful and upright servant - refuses to grant himself such comforts of the flesh, to which he was in fact quite entitled to take with his wife Bathsheba. So in the morning, King David plots Urriah's death, that he might take Bathsheba as a wife and cover up his sexual sins with her. He brazenly writes a letter to his General Joab, who had command over the forces in which Urriah served, and placed that very instrument in Urriah's hands to himself deliver its contents to Joab! Verse 14 records, "And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Urriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die!"¹¹

Now David's hands are stained, not only with his sins of adultery, not only with the betrayal of the royal power entrusted to him by GOD and the people, but now also by murder with the blood of his servant Urriah!

⁹ 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 11:4-5.

¹⁰ 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 11:11.

¹¹ 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 11:14.

Thinking that he has hid his evil deeds from GOD and from men, he takes Bathsheba as a wife. But GOD sends his prophet Nathan, who brings before David a fictitious account of a wealthy and powerful man who, to entertain guests, takes the only beloved lamb of a poor man to kill it. And when David pronounces his kingly judgement of wrath upon this supposed trespasser, Nathan replies in II SAMUEL 12:5-6, "...As The LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity!"¹²

Now the terrible but just punishments of The Almighty fall upon David and those whom he loves! The prophet Nathan, as GOD's messenger, confronting David with these haunting words in II SAMUEL 12:7, "...Thou art the man...!"¹³ David had "despised The Commandment of The LORD, and therefore Divine judgement was obliged to follow."¹⁴ The sword was to come upon David's family. His wives were to be taken by another in the sight of all men. And these evils would be raised up from within his own household.¹⁵ But now in David's response we see that, though a sinner, he was a man after GOD's own heart, for he confessed in II SAMUEL 12:13 to Nathan, "...I have sinned against the LORD...!"¹⁶

But The Almighty, seeing that David was humbly honest and earnestly contrite before Him, sends him these words through His prophet Nathan in II SAMUEL 12:13-14, "...The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of The LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die!"¹⁷ Now David's heart and soul are broken and crushed! For if he alone was to bear the consequences of his sins only upon himself, that David might have endured without too many tears. But David's sins bring suffering to others, even those that are dear to him: strife, suffering, violence and death! Those that suffer because of his sins with him will be his very loved ones, his household, his flesh and blood!

Thus do we come to David's prayer of confession, repentance and desire for forgiveness from The LORD in PSALM 51. Wycliffe comments that PSALM 51 is the "...most profound of the Penitential PSALM. The

¹² 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 12:5-6.

¹³ 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 12:7.

¹⁴ 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 12:9.

¹⁵ 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 12:10-12.

¹⁶ 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 12:13.

¹⁷ 2, KJV, II SAMUEL 12:13-14.

depth of individual experience, the sense of sin, and the plea for forgiveness are unsurpassed in any other PSALM.”¹⁸ Now we are ready to begin to understand what David found to be so before The Everlasting Throne of Grace, as in PSALM 51:17, “The sacrifices of GOD are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O GOD, Thou wilt not despise!”¹⁹

VII. WHAT ARE THESE “SACRIFICES OF GOD?”

What are these ZIVCHEY ‘ELOHIYM - זִבְחֵי אֱלֹהִים - these “Sacrifices of GOD,” which GOD will not despise? Sacrifices to The Almighty are generally offered up by the faithful for the purposes of “...atoning for sin, seeking [His] favor, or expressing thanks [to Him].”²⁰ There were different classes of animal sacrifices ordained by The LORD in The Torah to ancient Israel for offerings up an Altar of GOD:²¹ 1) the “OLOTEYCHEM²² - עֹלֹתֵיכֶם - the “whole burnt offering;”²³ 2) the HASHSHELAMIYM²⁴ - הַשְּׁלָמִים - the “peace offering;”²⁵ 3) the TODAT²⁶ - תּוֹדַת - the “thank offering;”²⁷ 4) the CHATTA’T²⁸ - חַטָּאת - the “sin offering.”²⁹ Of these, Fausset comments, “The burnt offering was wholly burnt upon the altar; the sin offering was in part burnt upon the altar, in part given to the priests, or burnt outside the camp. The peace offering was shared between the altar, the priests, and the sacrificer.”³⁰

David knew in his soul, and was convicted of in his heart, that mere external forms of religious sacrificial worship in of themselves do not bring GOD’s forgiveness without a humble and penitent faith behind them! So Fausset observes of the sacrificial system of ancient Israel, “Every sacrifice was assumed to be vitally connected with the spirit of the worshipper.

¹⁸ 6, Wycliffe, PSALM 51, A Cry For Forgiveness, introduction, page 514.

¹⁹ 2, KJV, PSALM 51:17.

²⁰ 7, Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, entry for “Sacrifice,” noun, 1, page SAC – SAD.

²¹ 8, Fausset’s Bible Dictionary, entry for “3060 Sacrifice,” subentry 3060.01.

²² 3, BHS, DEUTERONOMY 12:11.

²³ 2, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 12:11.

²⁴ 3, BHS, LEVITICUS 3:1.

²⁵ 2, KJV, LEVITICUS 3:1.

²⁶ 3, BHS, LEVITICUS 7:13

²⁷ 2, KJV, LEVITICUS 7:13.

²⁸ 3, BHS, LEVITICUS 4:3.

²⁹ 2, KJV, LEVITICUS 4:3.

³⁰ 8, Fausset’s Bible Dictionary, entry for “3060 Sacrifice,” subentry 3060.01.

Unless the heart accompanied the sacrifice GOD rejected the gift.”³¹
Wycliffe observes of the human author of PSALM 51, “His sense of sin and guilt requires more than burnt offerings [for his sins]; hence he offers his broken spirit and contrite heart!”³²

The external sacrifices offered up under The Old Covenant were not acceptable to GOD if there was no internal repentance of the heart and seeking of forgiveness by the soul! So too mere external Christian formalism in penance without an earnest internal repentance are abominations before The Almighty! Therefore, as Walvoord and Zuck observe, David offered up first “...a broken and contrite (crushed) heart [and] a humbled spirit fully penitent for [his] sin!”³³ Only then did he offer up the required external acts of penance before GOD and men!

VIII. THE SACRIFICES OF GOD FIRST ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT

First, we are told that the right sacrifices of a man to GOD are a RUACH NISHBARAH - נְשִׁבָרָה רִיחַ - a spirit which is caused to be broken. The spirit of man here - as distinct from man’s soul or heart - is first his breath of life, which is animated by GOD to give a man’s body life. The spirit of man is given life by the Divine breath of The Spirit of GOD.³⁴ Whitaker et al offers a wide range of meanings for the RUACH or spirit of man: “...[in] man, as [both his] sign and symbol of life: [his very] breath of life; ...[a man’s] temper, disposition; ...[his] vigour, courage, temper, anger, impatience or patience, disposition, ...[his] seat of emotion, desire, ...[sometime his] organ of mental acts, the will; ...[sometimes also a man’s] moral character...”³⁵

The “broken” here - from the verb SHAVAR שָׁבַר - appears to describe the state which GOD looks in the spirit of a man as part of “The Sacrifices of GOD” which He approves of. SHAVAR is given here in as a simple, passive and present state of being made broken, maimed, crippled,

³¹ 8, Fausset’s Bible Dictionary, entry for “3060 Sacrifice,” subentry 3060.01.

³² 6, Wycliffe, PSALM 51:13-17, PAGE 514.

³³ 9, Walvoord and Zuck, PSALM 51:16-17, page 833.

³⁴ 10, Whitaker’s R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B9235, רִיחַ noun common both singular construct, page 924.

³⁵ 10, Whitaker’s R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B9235, רִיחַ noun common both singular construct, page 924.

shipwrecked, crushed, destroyed or shattered.³⁶ Calvin says here, “The man of broken spirit is one who has been emptied of all vain-glorious confidence, and brought to acknowledge that he is [as] nothing...” before the awesome and great Glory of The Almighty!³⁷

IX. THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE SECOND A BROKEN HEART

Second, we are told that the right sacrifices of a man to GOD is a LEV-NISHBAR - לֵב־נִשְׁבַּר - a heart broken. Here we look at the Hebrew concept of the human heart which, though overlaps and shares attributes of the human spirit and soul, is yet distinct. This is “the inner man, [the comprehending] mind [and] will, ...in contrast with the outer man; ...[the] affections; ...[the] conscience; [the] memory; ...[the place of] thinking, reflection; ...[the seat of] moral character; ...[the] seat of appetites, ...emotions, [and] passions.”³⁸

Whitaker et al notes the wide range of emotions which in The Hebrew Scriptures the heart is said to possess and experience. When King David sinned, his “...heart (conscience) smote him,” which brought him to repentance before The LORD. “...GOD tries the heart; sees the heart and ...tries them, refines them; searches the heart and tries the reins [thereof].” A man may be “...broken of heart; ...[have a] clean heart; [be spiritually cleansed and receive from GOD a] new heart.” The wicked man has an “...evil heart; ...[is] godless in heart; ...[is] perverse in heart.” As the “...seat of pride,” the wicked are bent in the “...deceit of their heart; ...[and spiritually diseased] with a double heart.” It is the seat of both great happiness and great distress, the center “...of joy and gladness; ...of desire; ...of trouble, sorrow, pain, vexation, trembling, faintness; it is wounded, dies within one out of fear; ...[it] take[s] courage; ...[it can be] stout-hearted; ...[as] as firm as stone; [and] as the heart of the lion.”³⁹

³⁶ 10, Whitaker’s R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B9971, שִׁבַּר verb niphil participle feminine singular absolute homonym 1, page 990.

³⁷ 5, Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume V, PSALMS 36-92, PSALM LI, 17. The sacrifices of GOD are a broken spirit, page 306.

³⁸ 10, Whitaker’s R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B4812, לֵב noun common masculine singular absolute, page 524.

³⁹ 10, Whitaker’s R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B4812, לֵב noun common masculine singular absolute, page 524.

Now of this heart in men, GOD requires not that it break other men's hearts, nor that it break itself, but that it be "broken" before Him! And the sense of that heart being broken before The Throne of Grace is given in the present tense, that a man's heart not be lifted up in vanity before Him. Whitaker et al holds that our hearts are to be broken before The LORD as in the breaking "...of [a stiff or proud] neck, [or strong and haughty] bones, [or shattering seemingly sturdy] gate-bars [or a] rod [of iron]." For as mere idols of pottery are broken before GOD's holiness and greatness, so the seat of men's reason, passion and vanity – the heart – must "...be crushed, destroyed ...[and] broken down" before The awful and righteous Presence of The Almighty! ⁴⁰

And when a man's heart is broken under the weight of his sins and their terrible consequences both earthly and eternal, where shall his hope lay? And from whence should his deliverance come? Not from men, for PSALM 69:20 finds such comfort futile: "Reproach hath broken my heart: and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none!" ⁴¹ Rather, the only hope and deliverance for men is in The Almighty, our Redeemer! For, as Calvin says here, "The contrite heart ...[rejects] the idea of [its own] merit [unto salvation by The LORD], and has no dealings with GOD upon the principle of exchange!" ⁴² Therefore does PSALM 73:26 declare this: "My flesh and my heart faileth: but GOD is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!" ⁴³

X. THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE THIRD A CRUSHED HEART

Third, we are told that the right sacrifices of a man to GOD is a LEV-
VENIDKEH - לֵב-וִנְדָכָה - that same heart also crushed. These
"Sacrifices of GOD" demand that a man's heart which has been broken -
accompanied by a spirit that is likewise broken – must also be crushed. The
"inner man, [in his] mind [and] heart," must be made humble before The

⁴⁰ 10, Whitaker's R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B9971, שָׁבַר verb niph'al participle feminine singular absolute homonym 1, page 990.

⁴¹ 2, KJV, PSALM 69:20.

⁴² 5, Calvin's Commentaries, Volume V, PSALMS 36-92, PSALM LI, 17. The sacrifices of GOD are a broken spirit, page 306.

⁴³ 2, KJV, PSALM 73:26.

Creator before it can be remade by Him into a new inner man that may be employed in the service of The Kingdom of GOD! ⁴⁴

Of this broken heart which The LORD looks for in men, Calvin notes that a man must be brought to the “...deep conviction that of himself he can do or deserve nothing, and must be indebted unconditionally for salvation to Divine mercy!” ⁴⁵ For in the same sense that the human spirit and heart must be broken, so the human heart must also be “...crushed, broken, ...be contrite, [and if necessary by the correcting arm of The LORD, be] ...crushed[ed] down ...[in] Divine Wrath, and crush[ed] to pieces!” ⁴⁶

XI. THESE THREE TOGETHER IN A MAN GOD WILL NOT DESPISE

Finally, we are told that, if a man’s sacrifices to GOD are a broken spirit and a heart broken and crushed, ‘ELOHIYM LO’ TIVZEH – אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִבְזֶה - these GOD will not despise. Note first that all three of these things together make up “The Sacrifice of GOD.” It is not enough for the sinner to be merely broken in his spirit before GOD. Nor is it adequate for the penitent to be broken in his spirit and broken in his heart. What is required is that the contrite, confessing and repentant sinner have before The LORD a broken spirit and a heart that is both broken and crushed. All three must be present in the humble and contrite sinner in order that The Almighty not despise the sacrifices offered up to Him by men.

Let us not be confused however, into thinking that David is proclaiming that we need have only an inward ascent to our sinfulness and our need to be humble before GOD, without the penitent fruits thereof in our lives! GOD forbid! There must be true faith. There must be earnest conviction. There must be overt evidence of turning from sin. But with David, as Calvin says here, we must know, confess and live that “...the only way of obtaining the favour of GOD is by prostrating ourselves with a wounded heart [and spirit] at the feet of His Divine mercy, and supplicating his grace with ...[earnestly deep] confessions of our own helplessness!”

⁴⁴ 10, Whitaker’s R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B4812, לָבָא noun common masculine singular absolute, page 524.

⁴⁵ 5, Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume V, PSALMS 36-92, PSALM LI, 17. The sacrifices of GOD are a broken spirit, page 306.

⁴⁶ 10, Whitaker’s R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B2139, דָּכָה verb niphal participle masculine singular absolute, page 194.

Calvin joins King David and John The Baptist in declaring to us as in JOHN 3:8, “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance...!”⁴⁷

As we have noted, Scripture records that David had committed grievous sins against GOD in his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Urriah. Walvoord and Zuck observe that, as is the practice in many Christian denominations - “...David had to receive a word from a priest or prophet indicating he was forgiven. Only then could the penitent person again take part in [full fellowship and full corporate] worship and make a peace offering.” As for all men, David’s sin offering had to come first, and it had to be preceded by and accompanied with a soul that grieved for its sins before The Almighty. It had to be preceded by and accompanied by these three things: a broken spirit, a broken heart and a crushed heart! Only then, David knew, would he be lifted up by The Throne of Grace as in PSALM 34:18, “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit!”⁴⁸

XII. IN CONCLUSION - WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY?

Who can come before The Presence of The LORD and fall upon His tender mercies and loving grace? Here we are assured that a man with a broken spirit and a broken and crushed heart who approaches The Almighty in humble humility shall not be turned away! For we are instructed that GOD will not “despise” these right things in a man, these proper “Sacrifices of GOD!” The verb used here is given in the ongoing sense, in that The LORD is always ready to accept such sacrifices of repentance in men! Therefore will GOD “...[not] despise, ...[nor] regard with contempt” the soul of any such man!⁴⁹

So we have seen that The LORD desires the sacrifice of a humble spirit and contrite heart before His Presence! Such must be the states of our heart and spirit in order to receive the peace of The Saviour, which He offers us in MATTHEW 11:28-29, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your

⁴⁷ 2, KJV, JOHN 3:8.

⁴⁸ 2, KJV, PSALM 34:18.

⁴⁹ 10, Whitaker’s R-BDB Hebrew Lexicon, בָּרַח verb qal imperfect 2nd person masculine singular, page 102.

souls!”⁵⁰ For what was true of “The Sacrifices of GOD” for the sinner in The Old Testament remains true of “The Sacrifices of GOD” for the sinner in The New.

As Walvoord and Zuck put it, “In The New Testament, The Word of forgiveness is forever written in GOD’s Word – The Blood of JESUS CHRIST cleanses from sin... Yet ...[the Christian too] must have a spirit broken of all self-assertion [before The King of The Universe]; he must acknowledge his [absolute] need before GOD to find spiritual renewal and cleansing” by Divine Grace and not by his own works!⁵¹ Do not forget, o man, that GOD is totally sovereign and man is totally dependant! We can not save our own souls, nor cleanse ourselves from unrighteousness. The only remedy for men rests in GOD’s Amazing Grace Incarnate, HAMMASHIACH YESHUA” - הַמָּשִׁיחַ יֵשׁוּעַ - JESUS The Messiah!⁵²

Saint John declares in I JOHN 1:7-9, “But if we walk in The Light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and The Blood of JESUS CHRIST His Son cleanseth us from all sin... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!”⁵³ For as we have seen in PSALM 51:17, “The sacrifices of GOD are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O GOD, Thou wilt not despise!”⁵⁴ In The Name of GOD The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost, AMEN!

⁵⁰ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 11:28-29.

⁵¹ 9, Walvoord and Zuck, PSALM 51:16-17, paragraph 2, page 833.

⁵² 11, HNT, MATTHEW 1:1, HAMMASHIACH YESHUA” – from הַמָּשִׁיחַ יֵשׁוּעַ - literally, “The Messiah JESUS,” i.e. “JESUS The CHRIST.”

⁵³ 2, KJV, I JOHN 1:7-9.

⁵⁴ 2, KJV, PSALM 51:17.

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