

# `Irfán Colloquium

Ninety Seventh Session

EXPLORATIONS  
IN BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS  
AND  
BELIEF SYATEM



**Centre for Bahá'í Studies**

Acuto, Italy

3-6 July, 2010



`Irfán Colloquium, in 2010, inaugurates  
a four year centenary celebration of  
`Abdu'l-Bahá's Talks  
and the significant events associated  
with  
His historic travels to the West (1911-  
1913)

**The Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund** was established in 1992 to honor Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941), a Persian teacher of the Bahá'í Faith who became well known in Iran for his profound knowledge of the Bible, Qur'an, and Bahá'í scriptures.

Starting in 1993, the Fund began to sponsor “**Irfán Colloquia**,” to foster scholarly studies in fundamental principles of the Bahá'í belief system, Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, and the interface of the Bahá'í Faith and current intellectual and religious trends in the world. *`Irfán* being a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge.

`Irfán colloquia are being held annually in North America and Europe, in the English, German, and Persian languages. As of January 2010 ninety-three sessions of colloquia have been held. Selections of

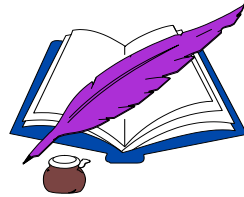
papers presented in English at the `Irfán Colloquia are published in a series of volumes, *Lights of `Irfán*.

# `Irfán Colloquium

## Ninety Seventh Session

EXPLORATIONS  
IN BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS  
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# Program and Abstracts



`Irfán Colloquium is held under the auspicious of  
**National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy**

Sponsored by  
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Suported by  
**Nadia Saadat Memorial Scholarships,  
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Fellowships,  
Manouchehr Salmanpour Memorial Lectureship**

**Centre for Bahá'í Studies**  
Acuto, Italy

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**`Irfán Colloquium**  
**Ninety Seventh Session**  
3-6 July 2010

Saturday, 3 July 2010

Afternoon  
Arrivals and Registration  
7:00 p.m.  
Dinner and free time

8:30 p.m.

*Opening Session*

Prayers and Meditation  
Words of Welcome

Introduction of the participants

`Irfán Colloquium's Program and Activities  
Centenary of `Abdu'l-Bahá's Talks  
and Visits in the West

*Iraj Ayman*

Bahieh Moayyad-Khademi Memorial Award

9:15 p.m.  
Questions and Answers and Open Discussion

*The Analysis of Scripture*

Sunday, July 4, 2010

7:30 a.m.  
Breakfast

*Session 1*

*`Abdu'l-Bahá: Europe and the Middle East*

8:30 a.m.

Opening Prayers and Announcements

8:45 a.m.

**A Comparative Review of Martin Heidegger's book  
"Being and Time" and**

**`Abdu'l-Bahá's Main Teaching in Europe**

*Arash Arjomandi*

9:45 a.m.  
Break

10:15

**`Abdu'l-Bahá and the Middle East**

*Kamran Ekbal*

11:15  
Break

11:30

**Important Personalities that  
Met `Abdu'l-Bahá  
in France**

*Jan Jasion*

12:30 p.m.

Lunch and free time

*Session 2*

3:30 p.m.

***Manouchehr Salmanpour Memorial Lectures III***  
**Tablets of Visitation in Bahá'í Writings**

*Vahid Rafati*

4:30 p.m.

Break

5:00 p.m.

**The Usage of Simile of Ocean and Sea by  
Bahá'u'lláh and Some Comparative Notes**

*Moshe Sharon*

6:00 p.m.

Break

6:30 p.m.

**Laqá Alláh - From Meeting Alláh to  
Attainment unto the Presence of God**

*Ami Shrager*

7:30 p.m.

Dinner and free time

9:00 p.m.

Open Dialogue  
and

*Glimpses and Snippets from the life of the Master*

10:00 p.m.

Free time

11:00 p.m.

Campus closes

Monday, July 5, 2010

7:30 a.m.

Breakfast

*Session 3*

*Scripture and Revelation*

8:30 a.m.

Opening Prayers and Announcements

8:45 a.m.

**Reflection and Refinement:  
Toward an Aesthetic of the Báb**  
*Moojan Momen*

9:45 a.m.

Break

10:15 a.m.

**Prayers and Tablets of Visitation  
Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh**  
*Vahid Rafati*

11:15 a.m.

**The Duty of Kindness and Sympathy Towards  
Strangers and Foreigners**  
*Julio Savi*

12:30 p.m.

Lunch and free time

*Session 4*

*Bahá'í Teachings Elucidated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

3:30 p.m.

**Aspects of the Harmony between Science and  
Religion as Described in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Talks**  
*Islander Tinto*

4:30 p.m.

Break

5:00 p.m.

**The Two Wings of Humanity:  
'Abdu'l-Bahá's Articulation of the Equality of  
Women and Men During His Western Travels**

*Wendi Momen*

6:00 p.m.

Break

6:30 p.m.

**Faith and Reason in "Some Answered Questions"**  
*Ramin Vasli*

7:30 p.m.

Dinner and free time

9:00 p.m.

Open Dialogue  
and

*Glimpses and Snippets from the life of the Master*

10:00 p.m.

Free time

11:00 p.m.

Campus closes

**Tuesday July 6, 2010**

7:30 a.m.

Breakfast

*Session 5*

*'Abu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'ís of the West*

8:30 a.m.

Opening Prayers and Announcements

8:45 a.m.

**A Survey of the References in the Press to  
'Abdu'l-Bahá's Visit to the West**

*Amin Egea*

9:45 a.m.

Break

10:15 a.m.

**May Flowers in the Ville Lumière: the Dawning of the Bahá'í History in the European Continent**

*Julio Savi*

11:15 a.m.

Break

11:30 a.m.

**Methodologies and the Challenges Posed and Overcome in the Research of the History of the Talks of Abdu'l-Bahá in France**

*Jan Jasion*

12:30 p.m.

Lunch and free time

*Session 6*

*Bahá'í Literature and its Interpretation*

3:30 p.m.

**Analysis of the Genere of Bahá'í Literatyre Commonly Called "Pilgrim's Notes"**

*Jan Jasion*

4:30 p.m.

Break

5:00 p.m.

**Authoritative Interpretations in the Bahá'í Faith: `Abdu'l-Bahá's Initiative**

*Iraj Ayman*

6:00 p.m.

Break

6:30 p.m.

**A New Concept of God in Some Answered Questions**

*Ramin Vasli*

7:30 p.m.

Dinner and free time

9:00 p.m.

Open Dialogue and Closing Session

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*END OF THE NINTEY-SEVENTH SESSION OF  
IRFAN COLLOQUIUM*

**Program Coordinators:**

**Roya Ayman**

# *ABSTRACTS*

*In Alphabetical Order of  
Presenters' Surnames*



## **A comparative review of Martin Heidegger's book *Being and Time* and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's main teachings to Europe**

*Arash Arjomandi*

The work "Being and Time" by the famous German philosopher Martin Heidegger is, beyond any doubt, one of the most innovative philosophical books of the twentieth century. Its deep and wide influences on the western philosophical thought have made it be considered an unprecedented contribution to human thinking.

This work was written in 1926, and a comparative study can be made between the main original thesis presented in this book and the general philosophical framework and ideas that the Master exposed to the European audiences during His historical journeys a decade before Heidegger's book was written.

The aim of this preliminary study is to look over the implicit connections that one can discover between these so different two perspectives: the one, purely philosophical; the other, divine.



## **Authoritative Interpretation in the Bahá'í Faith : 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Initiative**

Iraj Ayman

There are two categories of interpretations of the Writings and Teachings in the Bahá'í Faith, authoritative and individual. The former is confined to the interpretations by the Founders and then Centers of the Covenant of the Bahá'í Faith, while the later is the interpretation and understanding of that each individual arrives at through personal study and contemplation in the Writings and teachings of the Faith. A closely related area is the translation of the Writings from the original texts into other languages. This due to the fact that translating a text is actually a kind of understanding and interpreting that text. Thus, again we have two categories, authoritative or formal translations issued by the Center of the Faith and informal or individual translations by various institutions or individuals.

Throughout the history of religions interpretation of the texts has been, and even nowadays is, the cause of dissension, division, sectarianism, conflicts, persecution, and a host of harmful actions. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed basic principles which save the community from sectarianism and protect and

preserves its unity. However it was the initiative taken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá' that changed the direction of interpretation of the texts and teachings and opened a new path that makes interpretation a source of unity and accord in the community. This fundamental reorientation of the direction of interpretation (and translation) has been further elucidated and consolidated by the guidance given by Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. In this respect what needs to be clarified are the attempts of certain individuals that have tried to use their own interpretation for forming their own versions of Bahá'í religion and have tried to form various splintered groups.



## **A Survey of the Press Coverage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Visit in the West**

*Amin Egea*

Presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Western countries aroused great interest in the general public and the media. Leading newspapers, journals, magazines and specialized periodicals paid considerable attention to the personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í teachings that He was proclaiming. This study is an attempt to survey the many news reports of the events related to His visit and references to the Master published in the Western press at the time. This survey also includes the impressions gained by His audiences. Special attention will be paid to published private interviews and reports of His talks.



## **Abdu'l-Bahá and the Middle East**

*Kamran Ekbal*

The First World War led to major changes in the political landscape of the Middle East. The fall of the Ottoman Empire and its destruction by the allies, the October Revolution in Russia and the Soviet expedition to Gilan, British occupation of Palestine and increasing Jewish immigration into the Holy Land, an upsurge of Arab nationalism and the struggle for the establishment of an Arab Kingdom under Feisal are the main cornerstones of the new era in the history of the Middle East. The fall of Ottoman rule in Palestine brought also a period of increasing persecutions and danger for Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'ís in the Holy Land to an end. Increasing numbers of visitors from East and West could now visit Abdu'l-Bahá and consult him on diverse matters of interest. Many wrote down their memoirs and transmit thus a vivid picture of the topics discussed with the Master. These topics, generally concerning questions of spiritual, metaphysical, philosophical and historical matters, of course drew also upon current events, the present and future situation of the Middle East and world affairs. Based mainly on the unpublished memoirs of Dr. Zia Baghdadi, one of the leading Bahá'ís of the United States who visited Abdu'l-Bahá from December 1919 till August 1920, this paper will give a preview of Abdu'l-Bahá's ideas and opinions on matters concerning the affairs of the Middle East.





## The Bahá'í Genre Known as "Pilgrim's Notes": 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Western Talks

Jan Teofil Jasion

This paper will first look at the value of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks and in particular those He gave in the West. Then the question of provenance and sources will be looked at followed by a discussion on the shortcomings of oral talks and presentations,

Shoghi Effendi stated "that Bahá'ís should not attach much importance to talks, reported to have been given by the Master, if these have not in one form or another obtained His sanction."<sup>1</sup> He also said: "It was in the course of these epoch-making journeys . . . that 'Abdu'l-Baha expounded with brilliant simplicity, with persuasiveness and force, and for the first time in His ministry; those basic and distinguishing principles of His Father's Faith, which together with the laws and ordinances revealed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas constitute the bed-rock of God's latest Revelation to mankind."<sup>2</sup>

The chasm between these two statements will be looked at and pondered over.

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<sup>1</sup>From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *Lights of Guidance: A Baha'i Reference File*, compiled by Helen Bassett Hornby, 2<sup>nd</sup> and enlarged ed. (New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988), pp. 439-440.

<sup>2</sup>Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, new ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 281.



## Perfection and Refinement: Toward Aesthetics of the Báb

*Moojan Momen*

In this paper, I divide the arts into three major divisions: the plastic arts, those arts produced by using materials that can be molded or changed in some way, such as painting, sculpture, architecture, wood-and metal- working, pottery, etc.; and the performing arts, those arts where artists use their own body to express themselves, such as dance, theatre, and the performance of music. There are some arts that do not easily fall into these two categories, principally what may be termed the composing arts, that which artists produce in their mind and then transfer to paper, such as literature, both poetry and prose, and the composition of music.

The Báb produced a vast mass of this third category of the arts in the form of a large number of writings, most of which have not even been properly examined and catalogued as yet. He was known to produce his writings in a rapid, fluent manner which amazed those who witnessed it. For example on one occasion in the presence of the Governor of Isfahan, he wrote a work of 2,000 verses (about a third the length of the Qur'an) in a single evening. It was not just the rapidity and quantity of what the Báb produced that attracted people, it was also the literary qualities and the content. I will deal a little with the literary qualities below but, although it is obviously of great importance

in considering the Báb as an artist, I will not be dealing at length with the Báb's literary output in this paper but rather concentrating on the other two areas, the plastic arts and the performing arts.

The three main points that I focus on in this paper are: some of the writings of the Báb have implications about the nature of the material with which those who are in the plastic arts work. I would also suggest that they have a particular significance for artists from native traditions. The second area that I want to explore concerns the performing arts: the Báb himself as a performance artist and the nature of some of his writings as pieces that are intended to be performed as much as read. The third area that appears to me to have relevance to artists whether engaged in the plastic arts or the performance arts is the concept of refinement that comes across very strong in both the person and the writings of the Báb.



**The Two Wings of Humanity:  
`Abdu'l-Bahá's Articulation of the Equality of  
Women and Men  
During His Western Travels**

*Wendi Momen*

Having spent almost His whole life as a prisoner and an exile in the Middle East, `Abdu'l-Bahá, son of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, was set free in 1908. He travelled from the Middle East to Europe in 1911 and to Europe and North America in 1912-13,

taking His father's message of the renewal of religion and how to build a new civilization based on the spiritual principles of peace, justice and unity to a western audience. In His talks both formal and informal, `Abdu'l-Bahá articulated and developed the principle of the equality of women and men, responding both to the groundswell of the `votes for women', suffragette and suffragist movements and to the urgent need to secure peace before war devastated humanity, linking the advancement of women with the establishment of peace. This paper charts how `Abdu'l-Bahá developed this theme and articulated it as a foundational truth at the base of civilization.



***Ziyarat* and the Tablets of Visitation**

*Vahid Rafati*

*Ziyarat*, in its typical usage in the Arabic and Persian languages, means "to visit." As a matter of religious terminology, the term refers specifically to the act of visiting a holy person or holy site with the intention of paying respect, asking for forgiveness, and praying for the fulfillment of wishes.

It is for these purposes that there are specific tablets of visitation to be recited upon entering the site. Visiting the Bahá'í sites became a matter of custom in the Bahá'í Faith during the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá and The Guardian. After their passing, this became a praiseworthy act of faith.

To visit the House of the Báb in Shiraz, or the House of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, there are special tablets in which details of the manners of visiting these sites have been described. These represent the Bahá'í *Hajj*, or pilgrimage, which is distinct from *ziyarat* in the sense that whereas the *hajj* involves specific actions and verses which must be carried out, *ziyarat* does not. Thus for example the visiting of Bahá'í holy places in the Holy Land, or the resting places of individual Bahá'ís, are *ziyarat* visits since no specific structure or method has been provided.

There are abundant references in the notes of pilgrims that 'Abdul-Bahá and the Guardian when visiting the resting places of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh observed practices that are commonly found across religions when visiting a holy spot. Among those are reverence and silence, cleanliness and modest dress, and not turning one's back towards the threshold.

In the Bahá'í faith there are tens of tablets of visitation that have been revealed for visiting the holy shrines, the graves of the martyrs, and the graves of believers, in addition to hundreds of prayers that have been revealed for forgiveness and the progress of their souls. These writings and the tablets of visitation are among the most important and eloquent works revealed by the central figures of the Faith.

Among the most famous writings of Bahá'u'lláh is the tablet of visitation in honor of the Imam Hussein, the Prince of the Martyrs. Bahá'u'lláh further revealed tens of tablets of visitation for members of his family, the Afán family, the martyrs, prominent teachers of the faith, and other individual believers, to be read at their graves or in their memory.

Tablets of visitation are one of the fundamental elements for religious education in that they are

reminders of the spiritual principles of the Faith. At the same time, they remind us of the services of those who have passed away, and bring to mind the purpose of life, the value of their service, and the ephemeral nature of physical life in contrast to the everlasting life of the soul.



### **The duty of kindness and sympathy towards strangers and foreigners**

As enjoined in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Paris Talks* and as reflected in the recent Italian "*Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration*".

*Julio Savi*

The abandonment of racial, religious and nationalistic prejudice is one of the central issues in the talks 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered during His travels in the West. A ground-breaking concept in those days when the Western world was still "heaving with the explosive forces of a blind and triumphant nationalism," the idea of integrating immigrants into the culture of the country where they have moved is slowly becoming a part of the policy of a number of Western states. In 2007 the Italian government has issued a "Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration," which upholds many of the concepts expounded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá almost a century ago.



## **May flowers in the Ville Lumière: The dawning of Bahá'í history in the European continent**

*Julio Savi*

Against the background of the Paris of the fin de siècle and of the Belle Époque, with its magnificent intellectual and artistic efflorescence, a young American lady becomes the catalyst for the spiritual awakening of a group of early God-drunken believers. The paper emphasizes the mysterious ways through which they came to recognize the dawn of the new era on the European continent and on the whole world.



## **The usage of the simile of ocean and sea, by Bahá'u'lláh with some comparative notes**

*Moshe Sharon*

There is hardly a major work by Bahá'u'lláh in which there is no reference to a large body of water. Whereas clouds were applied whenever some mystical idea of

concealment was intended, the sea and the ocean are used for many purposes, and diversity of ideas. The divine knowledge, the Manifestation's laws, the huge store of the divine wisdom as represented by the prophet, life itself, all these and many others are described by the ocean and the sea.

I shall deal with this idea in comparison with the usage of this simile in Judaism and Islam and try to find out whether the Islamic usage influenced Bahá'u'lláh or whether the extensive usage of ocean is typical to him only.



## **Liqa' Allah -- from meeting Allah to attainment unto the presence of God**

*Ami Shrager*

The phrase liqa'ullah appears in full three times in the Qur'án and its literally meaning is "meeting God". Yet the Qur'án lacks in elaborating the exact nature of this meeting. The commentators of the Qur'án suggested a wide range of exegesis in order to overcome this vague phrase: from orthodox Sunnite through mystical Sūfī till Shiite interpretations. After the appearance of the Báb and following him Bahá'u'lláh this phrase acquired new interest and due to that a new interpretation as well.

In my short presentation I will try to reconstruct the meaning of the phrase liqa'ullah. To start with I will present the phrase in its origin location in the Qur'án (6:31, 10:45, and 29:5) with emphasis on the English translation. Then I will introduce the main

interpretations of this phrase starting with Sunnite exegesis, the Sūfic and the Shiite.

Finally I will show the change of thought with the Shaykhī discipline which influenced the ideas of the Báb in his Persian Bayán and later on Bahá'u'lláh in his Book of Certitude.



### **Aspects of the harmony of Science and Religion as described in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks**

*Iscander Micael Tinto*

This paper analyzes definitions of science and religion and the relations between science and religions as expounded in the discourses 'Abdu'l-Bahá pronounced during His visits to Europe and America. It also studies the concepts of intellect, mind and reason as expounded in these talks.

In one of His talks 'Abdu'l-Bahá states "If we say religion is opposed to science, we lack knowledge of either true science or true religion, for both are founded upon the premises and conclusions of reason, and both must bear its test". In other talks He seems to indicate the pre-eminent role of intellect or mind in the pursuit of the goals of both religion and science. This paper analyzes how the concept of harmony of science and religion is challenged in today's society and

suggests possible responses to these challenges in the light of the Bahá'í Writings



### **Reason and Faith in *Some Answered Questions***

*Ramin Vasli*

The relation between faith and reason has been, and still is, one of the most complex problems in theology and philosophy. Generally the problem has centered around religious faith and knowledge; but because all knowledge falls short of apodictic certainty there is a kind of faith inherent in all knowledge. In what follows, my main focus is regarding religious faith.

In the history of Christian thought the relation between faith and reason has been marked by such fluctuating patterns as equivalency, supplementation, independence, and opposition, the latter sometimes carried to the point of contradiction. With some reservation it can be said that the relation for Justin Martyr was that of equivalency. He came upon the Christian faith by way of philosophy and his high regard for the philosophic discipline was never abandoned. After his conversion to Christianity he wrote:

Philosophy is, in fact, the greatest possession and most honorable before God, to whom it leads us and alone commends us; and these are truly holy men who have bestowed attention on philosophy.'

The final authority for Justin was the Divine Logos fully realized in Christ, but prior to this manifestation all men were partakers of the logos. Socrates, Heraclitus, and others thought to be atheists would more correctly be designated as Christians. Christianity for Justin was the supreme and the one true philosophy. A greater degree of the equivalence of faith and reason is to be found in the thought of John Scotus Erigena and Hegel, for the latter religion in its highest stage becomes one with philosophy.

Tertullian and Kierkegaard are representative of those who hold that faith and reason are independent of each other or in opposition or conflict, the degree of conflict varying from contraries to contradictories. Tertullian in his assault upon philosophy asked, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? For Kierkegaard philosophy or reason is scandalized in the event of the Incarnation where the "crucifixion of reason" takes place. Reason can never give an account of the eternal, time-transcendent and space transcendent Being coming into history at a certain place and time. The Incarnation is the paradox of paradoxes, the clearest expression of the contradiction of faith and reason.

Another main view of the relation of faith and reason has been that of supplementation. For St. Thomas there was no contradiction between faith and reason; faith transcends reason without contradicting it; reason needs to be supplemented by faith.

During the Enlightenment the opposite was true. Faith was subordinated to reason and needed to be supplemented by reason thus making reason the supreme arbiter of truth. For this reason, Kant says:

"I had to remove knowledge [from any claim to deal with God, freedom, and immortality], in order to make room for faith."

This paper intends to deal with reason and faith by focusing on Abrahamic religions in which faith and reason are often posited as opposites, as if they had nothing to do with each other and every person had to choose between them. By focusing on *Some Answered Questions*, I will attempt to discuss and argue that there is no conflict between reason and faith, and both should agree and not be opposed to each other.

Indeed, the truth of reason and faith can be attained in the light of unification of them.

This paper is divided into three sections: first and second sections deal with reason and faith before and after renaissance, respectively. The Bahá'í perspective in general, and "Some Answered Questions" in particular, will be presented in the third section.

**notes**

## ‘IRFÁN COLLOQUIA PUBLICATIONS

Moojan. Momen (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation*  
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Maryam Afshar, *Images of Christ in the Writings  
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Revelation*, (Darmsdat, Germany:Reyhani  
Verlag,2009)

Vahid Rafati, *Áftab Ámad Dalil-i Áftáb*, The proof  
of the Sun is the Sun, (Darmsdat,  
Germany:Reyhani Verlag,, 2010)

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