

HUMAN SPIRITUALITY PHASES IN SUFISM

The Study of Abū Naṣr Al-Sarrāj's Thought in The Book of al-Luma'

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Abstract

This study discusses the phases that human beings must go through to achieve a noble degree in the sight of God. In Sufism, this topic is known as maqāmāt and aḥwāl. Maqāmāt is the spiritual position, that is, the existence of a person in the way of Allah by trying to practice the deeds to be closer to Allah. While aḥwāl is a condition or spiritual circumstance within heart bestowed by God because of the intensity of the dhikr (remembering God). To reach the highest level (ma'rifatullah), it can not be reached in a way that is easy and short time. Man must try to empty himself from sin and fill it with good deeds. For only with a holy soul, God gives much of His knowledge. This paper describes and analyze the stages of human spirituality in the book of a classic Sufi figure, Abu Naṣr Al-Sarrāj. Through inner experience, Sarraj formulated the concept of being close to God. This thought is based on the social conditions of society at that time concerning with material matters rather than spiritual ones. Therefore, the question is how the spiritual phases should be achieved by Al-Sarrāj? To answer this question, the researcher uses a qualitative method by examining the text and analyzing it to find the sequences of phases. The result of this research is that Al Sarraj formulates 7 levels of maqām and 9 levels aḥwāl. Humans who can run the phase are classified into Insan Kamil (perfect human) because there is no distance between him and God.

Keywords: Sufistic thought, Maqām and Aḥwāl, Abū Naṣr Al-Sarrāj, Book of Lumā'

A. Introduction

Islam has a very vital role for the life of the world, for the emergence of civilization and its orientation for the physical and the spiritual concerns. It can be proven by the fact that the world before Islam was dark in the sense of not knowing goodness and truth at all. Fraud, hostility and murder have been common in Arab societies before Islam. As if, they thought the actions are fine and not subject to legal sanctions. Then, Islam came by emitting its light in the crevices of darkness (apostasy and corruption) with the mission of

reforming and shaping human beings to be virtuous and moral, honest and wise to oneself or others, to build brotherhood, and to eliminate enmity and disunity among mankind.¹

Being religious is an inherent nature of man and is carried out since birth. This means that humans cannot escape from religion. God created so because religion is a necessity of life. The religion revealed by God can be understood from the introduction and experience of the first man on earth. Here are three things; beauty, truth and goodness. The three combined are named holiness. Religiousness is the penetration of a sense of holiness in one's soul since religious people will always try to find and get the right, the good, the more beautiful things.

Many scholars see that Islam teaches various positive values such as goodness, faith, piety and noble characters. If traced more thoroughly and deeply, there is no even any aspect of Islamic teachings that allows hostility, crime and various other forms of negative actions.² Similarly, the opinion of Jalaluddin Rachmat which states that the teachings of Islam are full of high social awareness not only about humans relationships with God, but also humans relationship with others.³

There is something very interesting in studying Islam, the mystical dimension. This dimension in Islam is known as Sufism. This discipline of science becomes very fascinating because it deals with the relationship between physical and spiritual aspects. The word *taṣawuf* – an Arabic word for Sufism – originated from *ṣad*, *wa*, and *fa* shapes *ṣūf* (wool) which denotes the meaning of wearing wool. This is related to the Sufi life.

Etymologically, the meaning undergoes disputes from the previous scholars as well as the muḥaddithīn (experts of hadith) about the origin of this word. Some claim that *ṣūfiyyah* is related to *ahlu aṣ-ṣuffah*, that is a group that perform worship in the prophet mosque in Madinah. Some also argue that Sufism means the initial shaff (first line) of the Muslim ranks in prayer.

There is also a meaningful view of the people of *Ṣuffah*, which is one of clans in *Zawiyyah*. Thereafter, some say it comes from *ṣufanah*, that is the name of the wood that survives in the desert. There is also a meaning as *shafa-shaffin*, which means clean/ clear. The word was used in 8th century AD as an expression of Sufis who wore woolen clothes. It can be inferred that the origin of the word *taṣawuf* depends on the points of views. It is said *ṣuf*, by the view of the outward aspects, namely clothes made of feathers usually put on by Sufis. While the meaning of the word *ṣafā* which means clean, because the Sufis seeks to cleanse their souls from the despicable and bad matters. It is *ṣufanah* because most Sufis are

¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al Quran* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1999), 9th edition, 375-377.

² Ngainun Naim, *Teologi Kerukunan Mencari Titik Temu dalam Keragaman* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Teras, 2011), 18.

³ Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Islam Alternatif* (Bandung: Mizan, 1991), 48.

skinny through fasting, staying up late night, others exercises so that their bodies resemble a tree.

The emergence of the word "Sufi" as the first name in history, occurred in the second half of the 8th century, which was based on Jābir ibn Ḥayyan, a chemist who was a resident of Kufa. He introduced *zuhd* as his school. Similarly, it is based on Abū Hāshim, who is a famous Sufi figure from Kufa. The analytical review of Sufism shows that the Sufis with their various schools had a conception of the paths (*ṭarīqāt*) to God. This path begins with spiritual exercises (*riyāḍāh*), then gradually takes various phases, known as the *Maqām* (level) and *Ḥāl* (state), and ends by knowing (*ma'rifah*) of God. The level of *ma'rifah* becomes a jargon commonly pursued by Sufis. The framework of Sufi attitudes and behaviors is manifested through certain practices and methods called *ṭarīqah*, or a way of finding recognition (*ma'rifah*) of God. The scope of the journey towards God to gain recognition (*ma'rifah*) prevailing among Sufis is often referred as an '*Irfānī*' framework.

This research will explore about one of the principal studies of Sufism; spiritual phases of humans in *Maqāmāt* and *Aḥwāl*. The phase has several levels that must be passed through by humans if they want to get dignity in the sight of Allah. The concept of *maqāmāt* and *aḥwāl* has long been a core study of classical Sufi figures, one of which is Abū Naṣr Al-Sarrāj in Al-Lumā'.

B. Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj and His Life

His full name is Abdullāh Ibn 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Yaḥyā. He was born in Nishapur, though his birth month and year are not known properly. Regarding the very limited history of his life, Nicholson expressed his surprise that a popular and glorified figure of his time disappeared in the historical record:

“No information reaches us except for very little about al-Sarraj's life history, early tasawuf writers narrated from him secretly the information that existed about him as far as my pengerathu, mentioned in tadzkirat al-awliya by fariduddin al-Athark, Written by Abū Maḥāsīn al-Dzahabī in Tārikh al-Islām, Abū Fala in Shadzarat al-Dzahab and other writers in Saffirāt al-Auliya'... is an oddity of early tasawuf writers to forget about their existence, they do not make work about it which tells of the condition and the journey His life, in which he is an insignificant figure in science in the field of fiqh science, and became the teacher of his people in the nobility and tasawwuf.”

Nonetheless, scholars acknowledge the expertise of al-Sarrāj as the author of the works of mysticism and of the renunciation (*zuhd*) lifestyle. He is also known for his high intellectual and spiritual achievements. In addition, he also studied the science of fiqh which makes him popular as a teacher of Sufis and fiqh experts.

Al-Sarrāj traveled widely to Islamic countries to spread his ideas of Sufism. His masterpiece, *Al-Luma'* is an illustration of his wanderings to various Islamic empires from Nishapur, his hometown to Cairo, then to the cities of Baghdad, Damascus, Ramlah, Dimiyath, Basrah and Tibriz.

In the view of al-Sarrāj, Sufism in his time has undergone many aberrations. Not a few people resembled to be Sufis and had much to say about Sufism matters claiming their own writings, whereas they are not really Sufis. According to al-Sarrāj, the truly Sufi is the one who has consistently taken off any relationship to other than Allah, so he performs many worship, *riyāḍāh* (bodily exercises) and *mujāhadah* (spiritual exercises).

C. *Maqāmāt* and *Aḥwāl* in Al-Sarrāj's Views

Maqāmāt is the plural form of *maqām*. Etymologically, it means a standing place, station, location, position, or level. As to terminology, it implies a spiritual position. In the world of Sufism, every Sufi takes a different order of *maqām*, but its substance remains the same.⁴ In the Qur'an, the word *maqām* spreads over several verses which alludes to both spiritual and material meanings: al-Baqarah (2): 125, al-Isrā'(17): 79, Maryam (19): 73, aṣ-Ṣaffāt (37): 164, ad-Dukhān (44): 51, and ar-Rahmān (55): 46.

If al-Qushairi and al-Ḥujwiri defined *maqām* as the existence of a person in the way of Allah filled with duties and required to keep it up in order to attain perfection. So, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj has a systematic and comprehensive view of *maqām*. According to him, *maqām* is the position or level of a servant in the presence of Allah obtained through a series of devotions (worship), sincerity against lust and diseases of the heart (*mujāhadah*), spiritual exercises (*riyadhah*), and directing the whole body of the soul solely To God and decide besides Him.

Aḥwāl is the plural word of *ḥāl*. It was used by Sufis to denote spiritual conditions. It is frequently translated into state of being.⁵ Al-Sarrāj maintains *aḥwāl* as anything that dwells in the heart with the continuing reason of *dhikr*. Some say that *ḥāl* is a *dhikr khofī* or *dhikr* which is hidden. In his view, *ḥāl* is not obtained through worship, *riyādhah*, and *mujāhadah*, but by the grace of God.

Al-Sarrāj also refers to Abū Sulaimān ad-Dārani's statement regarding this *aḥwāl*. According to ad-Darani if the relationship with God has so penetrated into the heart, then all the limbs become light. According to al-Sarrāj, this statement encompasses two meanings: the limbs become very light when running *mujāhadah* and difficult in running the worship. Secondly, when a man has entered the intimacy of *mujāhadah* and worship, his

⁴ Amatullah Armstrong, *Kunci Memasuki Dunia Tasawuf: Khazanah Istilah Sufi* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 175.

⁵ Annemarie Schimmel, *Dimensi Mistik dalam Islam*, terj. Sapardi Djoko Damono dkk (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2000), 123.

good deeds and his heart will feel good and sweet, leave from him a sense of tiredness and illness that may have existed before. Al-Sarrāj also holds the view of other Sufis that *ḥāl* is a gift from God, while the *maqām* is an effort of real struggle. *Maqām* refers to an active work, while *ḥāl* is a passive thing in its existence.⁶

Al-Sarrāj has a phenomenal work, *Al-Luma'*. This is the oldest reference on sufism, the spirit of the Qur'an and the pearls of as-Sunnah. All the ideas of al-Sarraaj in Sufism are outlined in this book. The great themes contained in this book are:

1. Sufism. In this chapter, al-Sarraaj displays Sufism and its encompassing devices such as its definitions, matter and attributes. He adds the material about the meaning of tawhid and ma'rifat as well as the qualities that exist in the person who runs it.
2. *Maqāmāt* and *aḥwāl*. Al-Sarrāj made the systematic *Maqāmāt* and *Aḥwāl*, which is slightly different from other figures. Although in general the points are the same. He explains these spiritual stations plainly as repentance, *wara'*, *zuhd*, *faqr* and so on. As for *aḥwāl*, He also explains in detail about *murāqabah*, *qurb*, *maḥabbah* and so on.
3. Example on the Messenger of Allah and his companions. In this chapter, al-Sarrāj describes how the messenger Muhammad had the ideal personality and was a role model. He describes the side of the life of a Sufistic prophet, and prophetic privileges gained from God. It is also accomplished with the life of the Companions of the Prophet. He describes the special personality of Abū Bakr, 'Umar bin Khaṭṭāb, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and 'Alī bin Abi Ṭālib.
4. The ethic of Sufi (*Adāb al-mutaṣawwif*). This chapter describes the ethic and courtesy of the practitioners of Sufism. Among others are bathing, taking ablution, praying, paying *zakāt*, giving alms and performing *ḥajj*. He also specifies the sufi dressed, responding to hunger and sickness, facing death, addressing wealth and poverty, and so on.
5. *Sama'* and *wajd*. Al-Sarraaj preached about hearing in the context of Sufism, which is listening to music, songs or poetry. When the Sufis are the same, he experiences ecstasy (*wajd*) and finds God.
6. *Karāmah*. Al-Sarraaj describes *karamah* (a distinct spiritual power) given by God to his loving companions, and close to Him.
7. *Shaṭaḥiyyat*. The discussion of ecstatic expressions or odd words coming out of Sufi mouths is also one of his concerns in the book due to he had considered the impossible things in Sufism.

Al-Sarraaj describes *Maqāmāt* as these frequent stages i.e., *taubah*, *zuhd*, *wara'*, *faqr*, *shabr*, *tawakkal*, and *ridla*. The first three (*taubah*, *zuhd*, *wara'*) take the process of *takhallī* (self-emptying). While the next four *maqām* (*faqr*, *shabr*, *tawakkal* and *ridla*) are *tahallī* processes

⁶ Al-Sarrāj, *Al-Luma'*, 65.

(inner self-adornment). As for *tajallī* (self-manifestation) is where God manifests Himself in Sufi almost in all ahwal (*muraqabah, qurb, mahabbah, khawf, rajā, syawq, uns, thuma'nīnah* and *yaqīn*).

1. *Taubah*

Taubah is derived from Arabic *taba-yatubu-taubatan* which means "back" and "regret". While the understanding of repentance for the Sufis is to ask forgiveness for all sins accompanied by repentance and pledge in earnest to not repeat the sinful acts and accompanied by doing the virtue recommended by God. For the layman, repent is done by reading *astagfirullah wa atubu ilaihi*. As for the *khawash taubat* done with *riyadhah* and *mujahadah* in order to open the hijab that confines itself with Allah swt. *Taubat* is done by the Sufi to be able to reach the higher *Maqam*.

Taubah as described by Imam Ghazali in his book "Ihyā 'Ulūmuddīn" consists of three elements: science, things and charity. Science is the first element, then the second thing, and the third charity. He said: the first obliges the second, and the second obliges the third. It takes place in accordance with the law (provisions) of Allah SWT which takes place in His kingdom and *malakut*.

Related to this *taubah*, there are many verses in the Qur'an that explain this problem, among which is a verse that reads:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَمَنْ يُصِرُّوا
عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

And those who do evil or persecute themselves, remember Allah, and ask forgiveness for their sins and who can forgive sins other than God? And they did not carry on his evil deeds, and they knew (Āli 'Imrōn: 135).

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

... and repent ye unto Allah, ye who believe, that ye may prosper. "(An-Nur: 31)

2. *Zuhd*

Etymologically, *zuhd* means *ragaba 'an shai'in wa tarakāhu*, being not interested in something and leaving it. *Zahada fi al-dunya*, means emptying ourselves from the pleasures of the world for worship.⁷ According to the view of the Sufis, the world and all the luxuries, and the delights are the source of immorality and the cause of sinful deeds. Therefore, a Sufi candidate must first become *zāhid*. *Zuhd* is closely related to

⁷ Amin Syukur, *Zuhud di Abad Modern* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), 1.

taubah, because *taubah* will not succeed if hearts are still concerned to worldly pleasures.

Regarding the meaning of *zuhd* there are various definitions. Al-Junaidi asserts that *Zuhd* is a state of empty souls of possessiveness and ambition of control. *Zuhd* means to restrain lust, be generous and do good. The main emphasis on *zuhd*'s attitude is to reduce the desire for worldly life.⁸

To further clarify the notion of *zuhd* above, it is still necessary to include some more understanding. *Zuhd* according to Ibn Qudāmah al-Muqaddasi is "the transfer of desire from something to something better." According to Imam Al-Ghazali, "*zuhd* is reducing the desire to the world and away from it with full awareness and in the things that may be done." Imam al- Qushairī said, "*Zuhd* is not to be proud of the luxury of the world that has been in his hands and not feel saddened by the loss of luxury from his hands."⁹

Concerning the concept of *zuhd*, in the Qur'an there is a verse that describes it, among them. Meaning: Say: "The joy of the world is short and the Hereafter is better for those who fear Allah, and you will not be wronged (An-Nisa ': 77). Meaning: And Ti is the life of this world, apart from playful and mere jest. And indeed the home of the Hereafter is better for those who fear. Then do not you understand it? (Al-An'am: 32).

The above verses briefly explain that the life of the world we feel is only a moment and it will disappear. Disappearance in an instant thing, compared with the afterlife of life after death is eternal and eternal life and is a better than world life. *Zuhd* based on the meaning is divided into three levels. First, *zuhd* by keeping the world away from the afterlife. Secondly, *zuhd* by departing the world and by expecting rewards in the afterlife. Thirdly, *zuhd* by leaving the pleasures of the world not because of hope or fear, but of love for God alone. This third level is the greatest level by which the veil between a servant and God can be opened.

3. Patience

Patience, literally, means courage. In terminology, patience is a state of the soul is solid, stable and consistent in the establishment. Meanwhile, according to the view of Dhun Nūn al-Miṣri, patience means distancing themselves from things that are contrary to the will of God, remain calm when it gets temptation and show enough attitude, even though it is actually in purity. Based on the above understanding, patience is closely related to self-control, attitude control and emotional control. Therefore, patience can not be realized simply, but must be through serious practice.¹⁰

⁸ Asmaran As, *Pengantar Studi Tasawuf* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2002), 114

⁹ Ibid., 115

¹⁰ Tim Penyusun MKD IAIN Sunan Ampel, *Akhlak Tasawuf* (Surabaya: IAIN SA Press, 2011), 251.

Forbearance, according to Al-Ghazālī, if viewed as a restriction on the demands of lust and anger, is called as the patience of the soul (*al-ṣabr ‘an al-nafs*), while withholding from physical illness, it is referred to as patient patience (*al-ṣabr al-badanī*). The patience of the soul is needed in many aspects for example, to withstand excessive appetites and sex.¹¹

4. *Warā’*

Warā’, literally, means pious, abstaining from sinfulness or sin. While the sense of *wara’* in the Sufi view is to leave everything that is not clear the law, whether that concerns food, clothing, or other issues. *Warā’* is divided into two: outward *warā’* and inward *warā’*. The first denotes leaving all which are still doubted and leave a luxury, while the second doesn’t allow to fill the heart except in the remembrance of Allah.

According to Sarrāj, the *warā’* people are divided into three levels. First, those who distance themselves from the doubted things. Second, those who distance themselves from something that makes the heart doubtful and creates obstacles in the chest. Third, those who can live with a conscience.

5. *Faqr*

Faqr is literally meant as a person of unguess, the needy or the poor. Whereas in the Sufi view the needy is not asking for more than what has been in and within us.¹²

6. *Tawakkal*

Tawakkal literally means surrender. *Tawakkal* is when a servant before God is like a corp in front of the person who bathes him, unable to move and act. Hamdun al-Qashshar says *tawakkal* is holding fast to God. In understanding *tawakkal*, it is necessary to present Harun Nasution’s ideas. He said that *tawakkal* is submissive to the pre-destination and the decree of Allah, forever in a state of serenity. The example of *tawakkal* can be described as follows; if someone receives gifts, they are thankful. Additionally, if they do not get anything, they are patient and surrender to *qada* and *qadar* of God. Someone doing *tawakkal* does not think about tomorrow, just what is there for today. They will not eat if there are other people who are more needy of the food. They believe in God's promises and surrender to God with God and for God.¹³

7. *Riḍā*

Riḍā, literally means to be pleased, to be happy and to like. Generally, it is not against pre-destination and *qadar* of Allah, and acceptance of both with happy heart. Someone

¹¹ Rosihan Anwar dan Mukhtar Solihin, *Ilmu Tasawuf* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2004), 72.

¹² Amin Syukur, *Tasawuf Kontekstual Solusi Problem Manusia Modern* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2003), 30.

¹³ Abuddin Nata, *Akhlak Tasawuf*, (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2011), 202.

in this state will remove feelings of hatred from the heart and live in and feel of joy and happy to receive the catastrophe as well as to enjoy the pleasure.

The things formulated by al-Sarrāj are *murāqabah*, *qurb*, *maḥabbah*, *khauḥ*, *rajā'*, *syauq*, *uns*, *ṭuma'nīnah*, *mushāhadah*, and *yaqīn*. The explanation of Ahwal is as follows:

- a. *Murāqabah*. *Murāqabah* means feeling always being watched by Allah SWT so that this consciousness encourages people always diligently carry out the command and stay away from his prohibition.
- b. *Qurb*. *Qurb* means being close with God and to God. Sarrāj states that *qurb* is witness of the servant with his/her heart of God's closeness.
- c. *Maḥabbah*. According to al-Sarrāj, *maḥabbah* is the love of the servants to God which first emerged from the sight of the blessings God has given.
- d. *Khauḥ*. *Khauḥ* is a mental attitude of fearing God because of performing imperfect service, worrying that God is not pleased with the servant. The prophet Muhammad said: "When a servant shivers for fear of Allah SWT, his/her sins fall like leaves falling from the tree". Allah Almighty says: They fear their Lord above them and carry out what is commanded (Surah an-Nahl [16]: 50).
- e. *Rajā'*. *Rajā'* means hope or optimism, that is the pleasure within heart for waiting something desired and liked. This optimism has been affirmed in the Qur'an: "Those who believe, those who emigrate and strive in Allah's cause, they expect the grace of Allah, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." (Al-Baqarah: 218).
- f. *Syauq*. According to Sarrāj, *syauq* is a feeling very passionate and longing to meet God in this world. This is the precise and strong longing of the servant when he meets God. The whole soul of servant just focuses on God to the point that he/ she does not aware of himself/ herself. The servants are in the state of being unconscious of their surroundings.
- g. *Uns*. *Uns* in the Sufi view is the nature of feeling of always being befriended, never feeling lonely. In such circumstances, a Sufi feels that there is nothing to feel, nothing is remembered, and nothing is expected except God.
- h. *Ṭuma'nīnah*. *Ṭuma'nīnah* is a sense of calmness, no sense of anxiety or worry. Nothing can interfere the feelings and thoughts because a servanthas reached the highest level of spiritual cleanliness. A servant who has reached this state, he has strong reason, strong faith, knowledge and clean memories. Accordingly, the person feels calm, happy, peaceful and he can communicate directly with God.
- i. *Mushāhadah*. *Mushāhadah* is literally watching with the eyes of the head. In terminology, Sufism is to witness clearly and consciously what a servant seeks (God) or witnesses to God's power and majesty. A Sufi has attained this state when he feels that God is present or is already within his heart and someone is not aware

of what is going on, everything is poured out on The One, that is God. As the result, the veil is revealed to which is a gap between the servant and God.

- j. *Yaqīn*. *Yaqīn* is the highest state according to Sarraj. It is the inner essence of the whole *aḥwāl*, that is the culmination of the belief as well as being optimistic and feeling happy and feeling the sweetness of the communication with God.

D. Conclusion

Maqāmāt and *aḥwāl* which have been formulated by Al-Sarrāj depict that to attain closeness with God, self-purification and feeling the most beautiful grace from God can be achieved by various efforts i.e., *riyāḍah* and *mujāhadah*. All is done to achieve *mukāshafah* (being revealed) with God, to feel God's presence and to enjoy the sweetness of His bounty.

According to him, *maqāmāt* is divided into seven levels, i.e., *taubah*, *zuhd*, *warā'*, *faqr*, *ṣabr*, *tawakkal*, and *riḍā*. *Aḥwal* is classified into nine levels from the lowest to the highest state; *murāqabah*, *qurb*, *maḥabbah*, *khauf*, *rajā'*, *syauq*, *uns*, *ṭuma'nīnah* and *yaqīn*. When a servant can obtain those complete stations and states, he or she can earn the title of *Insān Kāmil* (perfect man).

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