



BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS



*United Religions Initiative Southeast Gathering
October 27th-29th, 2017
Kashi Ashram, Sebastian Florida*





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Compassion for Animals

Convener: Ahowan ICrow

Notes-taker: Ahowan ICrow

Other members: Enas Rahman Culhane, Ardey Turner, Windwalker, Swami Dhumarati

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

Compassion For All Living Beings CC (C4ALB) Brochure was passed out and we each read one of the Religious Tenets around the Animals

One of the participants shared how after reading the brochure, she realized she was eating her brothers and sisters

Another participant shared how she could not bear to see the pain in the Animal's eyes.

It was shared how it is more a question of Justice discerning between breeding the Animals out of greed, confining them rather than whether or not we are eating and using them.

"It is the fact that we are confining them in unnatural environments."

A discussion took place about having the animals as companions or allowing them to have open freedom allowing them to give of themselves naturally instead of using them as commodities.

The discussion evolved to sharing how we eat the suffering, antibiotics, hormones of the Animals which evolved to us having the choice to spend our money what we believe.

Allowing Nature to be Nature, and an aha was shared by several about being reminded to give gratitude to the Animals when we do partake.....and that all animals eat each other, it is how we allow them to be treated when we allow ourselves to partake.

It was shared how most clearing of fields are for growing grains that are being fed to farmed animals instead of feeding humans, and how less space is needed for that which would allow for reforestation.....and a reference to the [C4ALB CC website](#) for more details in the future.

The Proverb from the native American was brought to our discussion about "Which Wolf are you feeding?" The greed of the Animal Agriculture business or the honoring of the Animals.

We ended with the story of the Doghouse, Animal Ashram and the Bulls.



Creating Space for Creativity to Blossom in a Busy World/Honoring Quiet Space and What Can Come out of That

Convener: Robin/Shanti

Other members: Mary, Clara, Coby, Adeola, Shanti, Agni, Paula, Robin

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

-common theme was the need to honor ourselves, and create space in our lives to do our spiritual practices and creative expressions. Many indicated that taking care of others, holding down jobs, etc., seem to take priority in terms of use of our time.

-If it's meant for you, it won't pass you by

-theme of dharma/right work was discussed. Some indicated they were not clear on this now, and they are ok with that.

-Looking at the other and thinking they have a more ideal life

-The need to seek balance

-Creativity and meditation/silence both expand time or feel timeless and connect you to your sense of oneness



Dealing with Contentions in Cooperation Circles

Convener: Sandy Westin

Notes-taker: Sandy Westin

Other members: Angie, Enas, Barb Turner, S Westin

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

We reviewed and discussed Sandy's "[Elements of the CC Vitality Cycle](#)."

Elements of the CC Vitality Cycle

Stage 1 - Catching the Spark: One or more individuals become aware of and enthused about the vision of interfaith peace and cooperation.

Stage 2 - Sharing the Spark: They share their excitement with others, through person-to-person contact or at a group event, possibly convened for that purpose. Others

become interested as well, and agree to work together as a URI CC.

Stage 3 – Fanning the Flames: The CC is developed through the sharing of ideas and responsibilities. Programs, campaigns, and events are created building on the time, talents and other resources of those who include themselves in the CC.

Stage 4 – Burning Brightly: As a result of the CC's programs and other activities, others are attracted to become members, or at least sign up to receive news about future such programs and events. Awareness and understanding of interfaith work expands in the local community.

Stage 5 –Down to Coals and Embers: After a period of months or years, any one of several factors may lead to reduced support for the CC and its programs. These could include burnout on the part of the initial leader(s), emergence of a competing organization offering a similar vision, exhaustion of interest in the programs and events offered through the CC, and others.

Stage 6 – The Fire Goes Out: At some point, whether officially recognized or not, the CC ceases to function as an active organization.

Some topics for discussion:

- What does it take to have Stages 2 through 6 actually "cycle", rather than having Stages 1 through 7 be a one-time arc?
- How would becoming an official 501c3 organization influence this cycle? Does it make going through this cycle easier? Harder? Shorter? Longer? Have no effect?
- What do you think the biggest challenge is in "keeping the fire burning?"
- Is it OK for a CC to have a beginning, middle and end of its life?
- How might each of those stages be gracefully recognized and celebrated?



We shared where the organization we represented was in that cycle. One was at Stage 3 – Fanning the Flames, one was between Stages 5 – Down to Coals and Embers and Stage 6 – The Fire Goes Out. A third was just at Stage 2 – Sharing the Spark.

We discussed what kinds of frictions and conflicts can contribute to difficulties in CCs (noting the same is true of other organizations). Using spiritual practices to remind ourselves of our purpose and core values was an important part of the start of each meeting, as was checking in to see how people are before we go into the “work” of a meeting. When one individual is proving toxic to the health of the CC, we considered four stages of confronting the situation:

- a. Consultative-Stage 1: Meeting one-on-one with the individual to build awareness of the problem and invite them in helping to find a solution.
- b. Consultative-Stage 2: Meeting with the individual by members of the core leadership of the organization to express concern and discuss options for both the individual and the group.
- c. Authoritative: Bringing a person of recognized authority into the conversation with the person – whether within the organization or outside it, such as a mediator – to heighten acknowledgement of the concerns of the group.
- d. Finding the group’s voice: Establishing consensus of the active group members and determining a preferred outcome and solution. Conveying this to the individual concerned matter-of-factly and/or in writing with a defined decision/action due date and consequences to follow the individual’s chosen path.

Dealing with frictions within a CC is never comfortable for any concerned, yet it is an inevitable part of any human organization’s life cycle. Avoiding dealing with the situation can only result in continued stress on the CC, often at the cost of losing good members and leaders. To be a peacebuilding organization, we agreed, we need to begin within ourselves and our own organizations.

Note-taker: Angie

Cooperation Circle → common cause, interfaith, 7 people, 3 different faith traditions

More women

Shadow ?

Control/maintain

Spiritual

Problem people 1) consultation 2) authoritative ? 3) consequential

Touchstones/Parker

Donation/Ask

Partnering

“problem” handled by ?



How do we inspire and create spaces to have difficult conversations that are safe, healing and transformative? As interfaith workers how do we use our skills to deal with the prejudices we encounter?

Convener: Karen Watson and Mara Laxmi Ma Schiff

Notes-taker: Joy Jinks

Other members: Jaya Priya, Shanti, Bhava Devi, Audri, swami Anjani

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

- QUESTION: a time when you experienced prejudice?
 - o We each discussed personal experiences of prejudice such as social, gender, age, disability, sexuality, anti-Semitism, skin color etc.
- Lessons in how to deal with these situations?
 - o Keep your heart open despite
 - o Listen to new voices in a new way – it is a journey of listening and honoring
 - o Speaking truth is a learning process
 - o Do the best you can in one-on-one encounters – these encounters might be the best opportunities to support others in opening their minds and hearts
 - o Take time to have a one on one conversation with someone with a different perspective
 - o Look for teachable moments
 - o Listen to become more empathetic, compassionate etc...but speak the truth.
 - o Be in circle to support healthy and healing conversations around these difficult topics
 - o Phone a friend! – find support from those who give us advice and strength. Establish agreements with friends that you can call when in need of clarity and hesitation before reacting to someone.



Having Uncomfortable Conversations

Convener: Sandy Westin

Notes-taker: Sandy Westin

Other members: Barbara Turner, Elaine, Angie

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

Uncomfortable conversations occur in everyday life with friends, co-workers and family. We each had several examples we had dealt with – some with greater success than others.

Useful tools we had found included using Nonviolent Communication language such as “I-messages”, and listening thoroughly and non-judgmentally to the other person to help understand their point of view.

We then found the conversation moving in a few new directions: the difficult experience of Muslim Americans in our communities, and the recent confrontation between KKK and peace advocates in Charlottesville. We discussed how hard it can be to be in the middle of such confrontations without getting our own emotions hooked, becoming part of the conflict and violence rather than a source of its resolution.



How to manifest a safe place for the champions in our community to share their gifts?

Convener: Mary Sharrow

Notes-taker: Mary Sharrow

Other members: Mary alone

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

Discussion was rather limited as it was rather one-sided.

But I determined that most groups would agree that our most precious assets are those persons living in our communities.

It is the only thing that sustains us.

People have these amazing gifts and creative ideas to share. But many are not comfortable "owning" their gifts, nor have ever been asked to share their ideas or had their ideas and views honored.

How do we engage them, offer them a safe space, and support them as they grow into their blossoming ownership?

We have found the only way is through healing and it must start with your own – first - and then walk alongside another as they work through theirs at whatever pace they determine their healing to be. Then the world around you changes as your changes are revealed.



How do we address spiritual cross-cultural boundaries while really fostering interfaith practices?

Convener: Charlotte Agni Jaya Starfire

Other members: Paula, Mary, Elaine

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

Prayers to the Six Directions

By: Charlotte Starfire (Agni Jaya Starfire)

To the East, Wabun, to the place of the rising sun, the new day, the new dawn. To the place of springtime, the seed planting time. To Golden Eagle, the one who flies so high, lifting our vision to the highest heights. To Illumination and clarity.

To the South, Shawnode, To the high noon time, the full blossoming time. To the Beauty Way, to an open heart, trust, growth and love. To Coyote, the Trickster, the one who challenges our fixed realities. And to Little Mouse, who knows the smallest details create our biggest dreams. To the innocence of our inner child, to the power of love which opens our hearts.

To the West, Madjekeewis, To the setting sun, the harvest time. To the Brown Bear, Black Bear, Grizzly Bear. To the place of introspection; to strength from experience. To the place we go to reflect on the harvests of our lives.

To the North, Waboose, To the Wintertime, the darkest nights. To White Buffalo. To the place of death and rebirth, endings and beginnings, To the place of our Ancestors and those who have gone by before us. To Cleansing, renewal and purity.

To Mother Earth, To All Life, to the ones that swim, the ones that crawl, the ones on four legs and two leggeds. To the stone people, the plant people, to All Our Relations. May I walk in balance with you.

To Father Sky, to All That Is above and beyond...to this Universe and All Universes. May I open to my Infinite Nature.

Today is a Good Day to Die.

(This prayer is my personal adaptation of prayers shared by my teachers and absorbed by me over many years. Make it your own. Connect from the heart. Stand in the center of your own Circle of Life.)



Role of Women in Peacebuilding

Convener: Jaya Reinhalter

Notes-taker: Jaya Reinhalter, Angie Messner, Sandy Westin

Other members: Robin Saenger, Karen Watson, Dhumavati, Sandy Westin, Barbara Turner, Paula Winker, Angie Messner, Shanti Sanchez

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

- Elder women now dominating younger women in the ways that were dominated by men
- Have women learned to be leaders modeling after men?
- Women need to lead AS women and model a different way of 'being' than domination
- The patriarchal styles of leadership diminish both women and men's ability to express themselves
- Up until recently (with birth control) women were inherently limited by their roles as mothers
- The style of THIS event itself is very feminine and not masculine in stereotype
- How do we welcome men into Peacebuilding and this kind of work?
- Men need the support of other men to have permission to soften
- What's the association between male leadership in religion and our work in URI
- We want to make sure men feel welcomed and needed
- What kind of language do we need to use to bring in men?
 - o Perhaps the language of 'warriors' and 'justice' may speak to them
 - o "warriors for peace"
 - o "spiritual warriors"
 - o Justice, strength, and courage
- A "warrior" must know how to also heal
- Are we capable of co-opting and redefining language, such as warrior: in order to pacify and redeploy the violence of words?
- We as URI need to move into peacebuilding as a verb
- Look up "[Alliance for Peacebuilding](#)" – could associate well with URI
- In the process of healing or seeking justice we need to allow time and methods through which we can build relationship first.
- Men may more naturally align with the action oriented nature of Peace Building
- We might use language that men can hear and women can lead
- "Peace Building" in masculine ways = directive, militaristic, interventionist VS. building community, planting seeds, nurturing
- Heal ourselves first before trying to create peace outside of ourselves.
- It seems to be a more feminine approach to walk alongside a community to listen and understand their needs as opposed to imposing outside ideas
- It would behoove us to acknowledge that men are also going through a major societal role shift and that this comes with a backlash that is difficult for both women and men

FEMININE ARCHETYPES that are useful:

- (1) Relational
- (2) Restorative
- (3) Nurturing
- (4) Collaboration
- (5) Horizontal – inclusive – circle
- (6) Healing
- (7) Softening
- (8) Dialogue



Storytelling

Convener: Tsaniti Unolei (WindWalker)

Notes-taker: Angie/ Tsaniti

Other members: Ahowan, Laxmi Ma

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

The group discussed the critical importance of storytelling to people's ability to truly understand one another - especially across cultures. The book: *Letters to Friends: Wisdom Through Storytellers* and the model for Indigenous Understanding and ways of communication were discussed along with the research that demonstrated how people across all ages and cultures had the same themes running through their stories.

We discussed how sharing the lessons learned in our own lives with others helps them formulate new ideas about how to resolve things in their lives, and helps us clarify our own wisdom even more. It engages people at a level of understanding that forms trust, shares multicultural wisdom and fosters a greater sense of how we are all one in relationship.

The session was Engaging, helped participants look at sharing with others affords a greater sense of collective energy - collaboration. It helps defeat fear and allows people a greater willingness to take risk. The 34 storytellers in the book shared between 2 paragraphs and twenty or more pages in the book about events in their lives that brought them to discovery and an understanding of their path in life, brought them back onto their path or helped keep them on that path. Reading other people's stories helps readers to learn about themselves as well as the writer; it helps to discover the "we" in all of us and brings us closer together as a human family. Our stories help to shape who we are. If we have disharmony, it is an invitation to investigate and listening to others helps us open the doorway to our own mysteries inside at the same time.





Social Justice, Peaceful Communities, Sustainability and Peace in our Environment

Convener: Enas Rahman

Notes-taker: Ganga Devi Braun

Other members: Sari Heidenreich, Adeola Fearon, Enas, Ganga Devi

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

We walked through the Kashi Ecovillage to see the community alter, artwork and kitchen. The biogas digester at Kashi served as an example for a thorough explanation of Rosebud Continuum's biogas system as well. We discussed similarities and differences in our biomes and how we can share our ways of living lower impact lives with communities and individual households. Walking and sharing through Kashi's food forest, the integration of intercultural, interfaith, sharing with a harmonious multi species existence felt imply natural and obvious.

See more information and pictures about Rosebud Continuum at this link: <http://bit.ly/2xAKkZT>





What challenges need to overcome in order to resolve our differences and unearth our sameness?

Convener: Audrey Scott Williams

Notes-taker: Ganga Devi

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

- Bhava Devi: Sameness is often reductive and how can we rethink this?
- Storytelling:
 - o common ground and different space
 - o Stories help us to understand where and how someone can process a subject. Sometimes people need to process with people they feel safest with.
- "I know that we'll meet on the path....this is why the circle is where we all meet and connect".
- What is in common is breath among all organisms!
- We are in alignment and we must deeply listen while sitting with what is, including difference and discomfort
- All spirits need to be fed
- "I now forgive every person and place...."
- Love is revolutionary we want so much for things to be okay that we don't go out to make things right.
- Wounds come to the surface so that we can heal them
- Truth IS reconciliation.
- The role of URI in leading this massive trauma wound

Note-taker: Angie

Thank you, I love you, I'm sorry → truth

Not willing to bear the humanity of another

Trauma, unrealized gifts

Humility

Love them unconditionally
Even though I can't initiate
cycles of life, growth, death

Story of Black Widow Spider

Child trauma shaped my work Accumulated incident

Pipeline: 10-23 never charged, never tried, displaced trauma vs. heal/transform

Pool-traumatic growth Trauma-informed community

Spiritual – responsibility

Part that victim doesn't have to take on

Community / much larger

Cydes / remember



Workgroup on Difference and Sameness: How do you work with people/groups who have so much hate towards others?

Convener: Audri Scott Williams

Notes-taker: Audri Scott Williams

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

We have to be careful because “sameness” can be a reductive term in that it can take away from the individual’s/group’s uniqueness. It can also create a loss of identity particularly for those who may already be marginalized by society. Sameness may create a loss of identity. Sameness can be the codeword for homogenization. May also be a word that diminishes rather than honor.

Sameness can also suggest inclusivity and respect for diversity when the objective is to focus on what we have in common/unearthing our core values from which we can build bridges to peace. This is foster intimacy and lay the groundwork for appreciation of differences.

Reaction to difference happen on both a community and an individual level. This raises the question of what is our responsibility in reaction to difference. Honoring what is there. Respecting what is real and get out of our head to connect with what is real. When in the midst of difficult situation evoked by difference, remember the breath. Look at and honor the strength of each other whether we believe the same things or not. Move from the head (structure) to the heart (unity). Nature is a good reminder/model to witness unity in diversity.

Storytelling is a powerful tool to help people understand differences.

Do no harm.

Move away from the sense that you have to defend who you are.

Remember that the word ‘should’ is often a negative trigger. Avoid using ‘should.’

Is change really possible? Particularly when people hold deeply polarizing positions often centered in hate?

Some people may not be ready to let go and forgive.

We also need to recognize that what we see in the “other” may be a reflection of what is in us. Look for what is good in the midst of differences and clashing values.

How do we hold on to our integrity and space in the midst of dangerous and polarized situations?

Showing up authentically in the midst of adversity may be a start.

In our imperfection is the perfection.

Heart space is key and goes back to the question: How do I stay in my heart and what methods can I use to stay there in the midst of adversity? In the midst of people sharing from a place of honesty and people in fear of something being taken away.

Studying and understanding how ecosystems work can provide insights.



There is so much unmasked trauma, how do create spaces that allow sharing the pain and hurt without the push back response of “you are too angry!”

The Indigenous way of getting to AND instead of “this or that” is a teaching that may be helpful.

The dance of the shadow and the light is at the root of pain and suffering that can prevent us from coming together.

In spiritual conversations there is often victim owning and blaming. As the person harmed it is not my responsibility to fix it for those who caused the harm.



Community Development through the Arts

Convener: Audri Scott Williams and Joy Jinks

Notes-taker: Audri Scott Williams

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

Working Group on Community Development through the Arts became a continuation of the prior work group that explored combining art, storytelling and community development and a pathway to healing and creative relationships and community.

We are in the now – every generation has to revisit the issues until we get it right. We have to model the change.

We have to share our stories to create intergenerational understanding.

[Rosebud Eco Village](#) is a living example of sustainability based on Native American systems of integration and sustainability.

Shared trauma – how do we allow ourselves to be inconvenienced enough to move to the place of empathy and understanding.

Reminder: The light lets things shine but it can also burn things up.

Cutting arts out of school is detrimental because the arts/shared arts and expression are healing and allows children and adults to release and share pain.

Systems of economy and gift economies are a creative response to creating shared economies. The town of Colquitt, GA uses creativity and stories from the people in the community to create theatrical productions that have revitalized their once dying town. Swamp Gravy is now recognized as Georgia's Folklife Play. And there is an annual conference called Building Creative Communities which will take place this January (www.bc3-colquittga.com) Contact Joy Jinks.

Website: www.worldhealing.space highlights emergent community project. Contact Ganga Devi Community is our lab for identifying possibilities.

"Regenerative" – spurs people's imagination, creating sustainable communities through creativity.



Building Diversity in Cooperation Circles

Convener: Barbara Turner

Notes-takers: Barbara Turner, Tsaniti Unolei

Other members: Sandy Westin, Tsaniti, Swami Dhumavati

Discussion notes, key understandings, outstanding questions, observations, and, if appropriate to this discussion: action items, next steps:

Question: Who tends to be missing from our circles?

Discussion: Our circles tend to be aged 30-50, white, female and progressive Christian.

Question: As the circle grows older into Medicare, how do we maintain a full table of connected members?

Discussion: CCs need to make sure that children are growing up in the circle. The circle should have diversity with respect to age, religion, GLBT, racial, and other under-represented groups.

Question: Is the predominance of older, white women in CCs a wide-spread problem?

Discussion: In most CCs, younger people and males are missing. Some circles are composed largely of women 60-80 and religious "conservatives" are entirely missing. This is not healthy.

Question: Why is this important?

Discussion: It's not healthy for the circle. Under these conditions the circle is not viable. The composition of the circle impacts the effectiveness of the circle on the whole community. If the circle is not reflective of the overall community those in it lose touch with the differences in the community and have to make a concerted effort to reach out, mix with and share in other aspects of the community in order to stay connected, and in order for the larger, diverse community to embrace one another.

Alternative view: The circle does not have to be representative of the community. The CC is an ephemeral thing, not an institution.

Question: What are ways in which the CC can reach out to young adults?

Discussion: Identify the educational institutions in your area. Increase your visibility to them by means of flyers and mailings of up-coming events. Identify congruent organizations at each institution and offer to do an informational briefing. Offer opportunities for class projects, interactive sessions that focus on needs from the perspective of different faith communities, schools, cultural and other organizational gatherings. Engage young adults in discussions on what would be relevant to them and initiate programs with co-leaders from the senior and youth populations.

Question: How can we best determine what interests the college students, where their passions are?

Discussion: Invite them to a round table discussion on what the community needs for all its members. Identify what the community is lacking. Involve youth in organizational program planning.

Question: Then how would the CC then act as a catalyst for change?

Discussion: The CC would play an observer role at the round tables - looking at the dynamics and interactions at the round table. CC members would note which topics elicited tension, division, or depth of feeling. They would then let these observations be their guide.

Question: What about outreach to more conservative religions?

Discussion: The CC could send a "delegation" of 4-6 members, not necessarily the leaders, to



meet with the religious leader beforehand. The pastor could introduce the group at the service and then encourage folks to talk with them after the service. The delegation should be careful to keep the conversation educational, not a recruitment pitch.

Connect with the elementary and high schools of churches.. Invite students to events, gatherings on an on-going basis. Have coffee shop gatherings. Share ideas, write papers, then go back to the churches with the feedback. Ask, "Is this how you see yourself?" Print and publish!



Book Suggestions

Book Name and Description	Suggested By
<p>Scott Pack: "People of the Lie"</p> <p>"One book I think highly of, especially with regard to organizational breakdowns, is Scott Pack's "People of the Lie". It's available through Amazon for as little as \$1.99 I see, and may be in your library. While not a fun or comfortable read, it is insightful in helping us recognize and understand "toxic personalities".</p>	Sandy Westin
Grace in Aging by Kathleen Dowling Singh	Elaine DeRiso
The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander	Mara Schiff
The Little Book of Restorative Justice by Howard Zehr	Mara Schiff
<p>The Little Book of Circle Process by Kay Pranis</p> <p>(and various other titles in the Little Book series published by Good Books)</p>	Mara Schiff
Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson	Mara Schiff
<p>Letters to Friends: Wisdom Through Storytelling (www.letterstofriendsstorytelling.com)</p> <p>" It was written as an outgrowth of the work I've done over the years and is designed to help people learn to understand the value of their life experiences shared in the form of stories about events in their lives and the wisdom they gained from the experience(s). Research in the book shows that sharing these stories with others increases the learning we get from them as well as allows others to gain wisdom from them as well. "</p>	Tsaniti Janet Windwalker Jones
<p>Open Space Technology: A User's Guide" by Harrison Owen.</p> <p>"It takes you step-by-step through planning and implementing the Open Space process that we used this weekend."</p>	Sari Heidenreich

URI Southeast Gathering

Photographs



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