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Enos: His Mission and His Message

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Dennis L. Largey

Nephi concluded his last recorded sermon by saying: “And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as *the voice of one crying from the dust*. Farewell until that great day shall come” (2 Nephi 33:13; emphasis added). Enos inherited Nephi’s record-keeping responsibilities and also spoke as from the dust. What was his plea? Whom did he think his readers would be? What principles did he want them to learn? The following is a discussion of the contributions of Enos’ brief but vital “cry from the dust” found in the Book of Mormon.

Enos: His Mission

Enos was a righteous son of Jacob, Nephi’s younger brother. Just prior to his death, Jacob gave Enos stewardship of all the sacred records Nephi had entrusted to him. Even though they lived in a day of war and sin, Enos and others sought “to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God.” But “our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness . . . and they were continually seeking to destroy us” (Enos 1:20).

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The Lamanite hatred was also directed at the Nephite records as well as their traditions. The Lamanites had sworn “in their wrath that, if it were possible, they would destroy our records” (Enos 1:14). Chief among the Nephite traditions contained in the records, was the prophecy that the Messiah would come 600 years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 10:4). The record also justified Nephite leadership in the family and chronicled the rebellion and dissension of Lamanite fathers. Enos petitioned God to preserve the record, “that it might be brought forth at some future day unto the Lamanites, that, perhaps, they might be brought unto salvation” (Enos 1:13). In this instance Enos became part of the fulfillment of one of Nephi’s prophecies concerning the Lamanites and the Book of Mormon:

After my seed [the Nephites] and the seed of my brethren [the Lamanites] shall have dwindled in unbelief, . . . and after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even that they are not, yet *the words of the righteous shall be written, and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard*, and all those who have dwindled in unbelief [the Lamanites] shall not be forgotten (2 Nephi 26:15; emphasis added).

The Lord told Enos that his faith was like that of his fathers’ whose prayers were heard in behalf of future Lamanites, and whose words would be restored for their conversion (Enos 1:18). In a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Harmony, Pennsylvania, in July 1828, the Lord confirmed that in preserving the Book of Mormon plates he had kept his promise and that the information on the plates was intended to bring the Lamanites to a knowledge of the truth:

And for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; And that the Lamanites might . . . know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in his name, and that through their repentance they might be saved (D&C 3:19-20).

Enos: His Message

The apostle Paul taught that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine . . . [and] for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). As scripture, the writings of Enos contribute to both doctrine and instruction. Although Enos’ words are few, his doctrine and commentary support other writers throughout the Book of Mormon and other scriptures. Gospel principles are embedded in his struggle to know God and in his determination to serve him. There are nine such supported precepts or “instructions in righteousness” that make Enos a most significant “voice from the dust.”

1. To All Nations, Kindreds, Tongues, and People— Jesus Is the Christ

Speaking to Jew or Hindu, Moslem or Buddhist, Catholic, Baptist, or Latter-day Saint, Enos witnesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Redeemer of all humanity. The Lord’s declaration to Enos that “thy faith [in Christ] hath made thee whole” (Enos 1:8) sums up, supports, and testifies of the New Testament record and its doctrine. The book of Enos in itself is another testament of Jesus Christ; it contains scripture consistent with the overall purpose of the Book of Mormon. Concerning his work on the small plates, Nephi wrote: “For the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved” (1 Nephi 6:4). He also commanded those who would write on the plates after him “not [to] occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men” (v 6). True to his commission, the Book of Mormon record keepers were highly selective in what they engraved on their plates. From the revelations placed on the small plates of Nephi, those who succeeded Nephi understood that their writings would, first and most importantly, be a witness of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Mormon focuses on the Savior and his gospel. Its characters and events are always secondary to the doctrine and witness of Christ that extends from them. Consistent with this concept, the message of Jesus Christ is the central theme in the book of Enos, which is the story of how one man applied the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ to his life. The story of Enos teaches that Jesus is the answer to the hungry soul, he is the one who can say, “Thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed” (Enos 1:5). In this regard the words of Enos correlate with President Ezra Taft Benson’s invitation concerning reading the Book of Mormon: “Let us read the Book of Mormon and be convinced that Jesus is the Christ. Let us continually reread the Book of Mormon so that we might more fully come to Christ, be committed to Him, centered in Him, and consumed in Him” (58).

2. Forgiveness Sometimes Requires a “Wrestle Before God”

The story of Enos teaches us that there is a price to pay both in effort and attitude before we can receive forgiveness of our sins. Enos said: “I will tell you of the wrestle I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins” (Enos 1:2). Enos’ wrestle before God was a spiritual struggle which contains lessons that can apply to all people who seek forgiveness through the Atonement. In many cases, this wrestle contains the following four elements:

(a) *A wrestle with sorrow.* Repentant persons experience deep disappointment in knowing that their sinful lives have offended God. This sorrow is intensified as they confront the great disparity between their sins and the standards which God has set.

(b) *A wrestle with guilt.* As these persons accept the fact that they have sinned and humble themselves, they will wrestle for a restoration of peace to their souls and the return of the Holy Ghost, which has withdrawn. President Spencer W. Kimball related: “There must be a consciousness of guilt. It cannot be brushed aside. It must be acknowledged and not rationalized

away. . . . There must be a pricking of conscience, perhaps sleepless hours, eyes that are wet, for as Alma says: ‘None but the truly penitent are saved’ ” (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* 87).

(c) *A wrestle with time.* Often the Lord requires a period of time to elapse before lifting the burden of sin. This waiting period compels sinners to reevaluate their commitment and live the promises they have made. When this upward struggle is completed, it can then serve as an anchor to hold on to after the remission of sin is granted. During this period of struggle they school their appetites and desires so that their only focus is upon pleasing God and keeping his commandments.

Although Enos wrote that he “went to hunt beasts in the forests” (Enos 1:3), President Kimball said, “But no animal did he shoot nor capture. He was traveling a path he had never walked before. He was reaching, knocking, asking, pleading; he was being born again. He was seeing the pleasant valleys across the barren wastes. He was searching his soul. He might have lived all his life in a weed patch, but now he envisioned a watered garden” (Faith 210).

(d) *A wrestle in prayer.* If we are to receive forgiveness, we must ask for it. Enos wrote, “And all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens” (1:4). Of this President Kimball has taught:

Here is no casual prayer; no worn phrases; no momentary appeal by silent lips. All the day long, with seconds turning into minutes, and minutes into hours and hours. But when the sun had set, relief had still not come, for repentance is not a single act nor forgiveness an unearned gift. So precious to him was communication with and approval of his Redeemer that his determined soul pressed on without ceasing (*Faith* 211).

Prayer is a significant key in many conversion stories recorded in the Book of Mormon. For example, king Benjamin’s people all prayed “with one voice” for forgiveness of their sins (Mosiah 4:2). At the turning point in his spiritual life, Alma “cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me,

who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:18). And king Lamoni’s father prostrated himself upon the earth and cried mightily, saying, “O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee” (Alma 22:18). Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). The story of Enos teaches us that sometimes it takes a wrestle just to open the door. This struggling is a tutorial period which becomes a hedge against closing that door in the future, for we learn through experience that God cannot be mocked and that mercy cannot rob justice.

3. Forgiveness Comes Through Faith in Jesus Christ

At some point during Enos’ lengthy prayer, he heard a voice say, “Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed” (Enos 1:5). Awed by the immediate relief he felt, Enos inquired, “Lord, how is it done?” The Lord responded, “Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou has never before heard nor seen. . . . Wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole” (Enos 1:8). Enos’ faith in Jesus Christ had brought him a remission of sin and had made him spiritually whole. The scriptures abound with such stories. For example, the faith of the woman with a 12-year issue of blood made her whole, as did the faith of the man lowered through a roof in order to be healed (Luke 8:43-47; Mark 2:1-5).

There is a thread of common elements in all such renditions. Each instance shows: (1) a compelling belief that Jesus was the one who could help them; (2) a determined effort to seek Jesus and receive the desired blessing; and (3) a humble heart.

4. Removal of Sin Must Precede Removal of Guilt

Guilt is a God-given protection designed to encourage positive change. Alma taught that sin brings punishment and

punishment brings remorse of conscience. The fruit of remorse of conscience is repentance, which activates the plan of mercy. The plan of mercy appeases the demands of justice, and at this point guilt is taken away. This miracle is possible because of the merits of Jesus Christ. True faith, when exercised, always leads to true repentance (Alma 42:15-23).

False prophets of the Book of Mormon sometimes tried to negate the influence of guilt on their followers and thus prevent people from repenting and living the gospel. Korihor, a noted anti-Christ, taught the Nephites to “lift up their heads in wickedness,” for “whatsoever a man does [is] no crime” (Alma 30:17-18). Today’s secular world reflects this belief by professing that guilt is a hinderant to “freedom.” One modern professional counseling strategy concentrates on removing guilt from a client’s life with little if any emphasis on modifying the behavior that produced the guilt. To sin without guilt, as this teaching implies, one must lower moral standard to correspond with behavior. This is exactly opposite from the true gospel principle that to remove guilt one must lift behavior through appropriate repentance.

The story of Enos testifies that the burden of guilt carried as a result of transgression can be swept from the heart through faith in Jesus Christ, which is indeed a miracle. Faith enables the repentant person to “[put] off the natural man and [become] a saint through the atonement of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19).

5. Charity and Good Works Follow True Conversion

When Enos entered the forest to pray, his first concern was for his own soul. Upon hearing the voice of the Lord announce that he had been forgiven, Enos recorded, “When I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them” (Enos 1:9). When we obtain the Spirit through sincere repentance, our hearts turn outward, having gained the capacity to forget self and love others. It seems intentional that when the

Atonement touches our lives, the Lord pours out his love in overflowing abundance. He knows his abundant love will not be wasted but will flow over and touch others. Being “born again,” as Enos had experienced, introduces us to a lifetime of service. We have all of the virtues associated with the gift of charity available to us through application of the Atonement. In a letter to Moroni, Mormon wrote:

And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling of the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, *which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love*, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God (Moroni 8:25-26; emphasis added).

We can apply Mormon’s formula to Enos’ story. He began to feel for the welfare of others as he received a remission of his own sins. The Holy Ghost filled his heart with hope and perfect love. Charity, or perfect love, is a gift of the Spirit that comes as we gain and maintain our relationships with the Lord through repentance and obedience.

After gaining promised blessings for the Nephites, Enos then prayed for the Lamanites. His prayer displays a significant order in his requests: first for himself, second for his friends, and third for his enemies. Obedience to the first great commandment, “to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind” brought true obedience to the second great commandment to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (see Matt 22:37-39). In essence, our first love (our relationship with God) empowers and directs our second love (our relationship with others). Unobstructed by sin, Enos now had the power to grow beyond his previous abilities. His desires progressed beyond caring mainly for his own people to include a struggle in prayer for the welfare of his enemies.

The conversion stories of Alma the Younger and the four sons of Mosiah followed this same pattern. After having their “wrestle before God” and receiving a remission of their sins, they

had a consuming desire to preach the gospel. As Mormon wrote, “They were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” (Mosiah 28:3).

In the Church today, the most effective missionaries are those who have first reconciled themselves with God so that the Holy Ghost can assist them in their ministries. Having been born again, they can then proceed with their desires to bless others as did Enos.

This concept could have significant meaning regarding the way we interrelate with each other. For example, let Enos’ prayer for his own soul represent *stage one*; his prayer for his friends represent *stage two*; and his prayer for his enemies represent *stage three*. Before attempting to resolve difficulties with others in either of stages two or three, we must spend some personal time in stage one—ie, reconciling ourselves with God, perhaps even wrestling before him in prayer, so that our emotions and desires coincide with and produce a temperament conducive to the Holy Ghost. The feeling of love generated through the warmth of the Holy Ghost enables us to *act* rather than to *react*, to *listen* rather than to *defend*, to *bless* rather than to *curse*.

The story of the martyrdom of Stephen is a dramatic example of this precept. Rather than curse those who were taking his life, Stephen “cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60). The key to Stephen’s ability to meet a peaceful death under violent circumstances and to forgive those who were taking his life lies in the experience he had just prior to his stoning: “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).

Stephen’s relationship with God led to his reception of the Holy Ghost and culminated in his glorious vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This all enabled him to be obedient

to the Lord's admonition: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt 5:44).

We in the Church are touched by the man who forgave the murderer of his missionary son, by the man who embraced and forgave the drunken driver who took the lives of his wife, daughter, and mother-in-law, and the couple who extended their love by adopting the boy who had stolen a car and accidentally ended the life of their only son. Perhaps, however, the application of this principle in our daily lives is not always seen in the dramatic episodes, but in the everyday kindness, generosity, understanding, and service we extend to our families and to our neighbors through having the "pure love of Christ."

6. Revelation

In addition to bearing testimony of the doctrine, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you" (3 Nephi 13:7), the story of Enos teaches an important principle concerning how revelation is received. Enos recorded that "while I was . . . struggling in the spirit, behold, *the voice of the Lord came into my mind . . .*" (Enos 1:10; emphasis added). This statement is consistent with what the Lord taught Oliver Cowdery when he desired to help Joseph translate: "Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation" (D&C 8:2-3).

Speaking about this mode of revelation, Elder Marion G. Romney taught that "the type of revelation most common is that which comes into our minds and feelings and induces us to do what is right" ("Peculiar" 264). In the scriptures this is often referred to as the "still small voice" (1 Nephi 17:45). In an address delivered at Brigham Young University, Elder Romney bore testimony concerning this form of revelation. He said:

I know that God can hear prayers; He has heard mine on many occasions. I have received direct revelation from him. I have had

problems which it seemed to me that I could not solve, and I have suffered in facing those problems until it seemed that I could not go farther if I did not have a solution of them. Through faith, and on many occasions fasting for a day a week over long periods of time, I have had answers to those problems revealed to my mind in finished sentences. I have heard the voice of God and I know his words (“Testimony” 329-30).

7. The Lord Visits Us According to Our Diligence in Keeping the Commandments

In answer to Enos’ prayer for his brethren, the Nephites, the Lord said: *“I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments. I have given unto them this land, and it is a holy land: and I curse it not save it be for the cause of iniquity; wherefore, I will visit thy brethren according as I have said: and their transgressions will I bring down with sorrow upon their own heads”* (Enos 1:10; emphasis added). Nearly every story in the Book of Mormon is a case in point verifying the truth of these words. The repetitive promise throughout the book was that if the Nephites kept the commandments the Lord would prosper them and if they did not he would cut them off (2 Nephi 1:20). The Book of Mormon itself is a record of the literal fulfillment of this promise by the Lord; its people were blessed or cursed as they obeyed or disobeyed. In this sense, the righteousness and wickedness of the Nephites make up two histories in the Book of Mormon. We learn from both histories the consistency and the reality of the consequences of making right and wrong choices. Righteousness brought the Nephites safety from their enemies, deliverance from their captors, refuge from destruction, and a knowledge of the mysteries of God through the power of the Holy Ghost. Conversely, disobedience brought sorrow and eventual destruction upon the heads of the people. The Book of Mormon readers learn these principles through stories about broken bows, disabled Liahonas, burned cities, and so forth. The plea of the prophets was for the readers of the Book of Mormon to understand that it was written so that we might learn to be wiser than they had been (Mormon 9:31).

Accordingly, all who read will be blessed if they can learn vicariously from the Book of Mormon experiences.

8. The Lord Keeps His Covenants

Enos' prayer for the Lamanites was that the Nephite record would be preserved for the welfare of their posterity. Enos said: "And I had faith, and I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time. And I, Enos, knew it would be according to the covenant which he had made; wherefore my should did rest" (Enos 1:16-17).

His faith enabled his soul to rest because he *knew* that God was perfectly honest in keeping all his promises. In section 1, the preface to the revelations recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said: "What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled" (D&C 1:38). There should be great significance in knowing that God by his very nature is "bound" to keep his word to us, if we keep our promises to him (D&C 82:10). In our lives we do not need to worry about God's being true to us. This knowledge frees us to work on our being totally true to him. Furthermore, knowing that God is obedient to his own words and promises enables us to develop the faith and trust necessary to become "as a child, . . . willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19). This submission is a necessary requirement for entrance into the celestial kingdom. Christ said that except we become as little children we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3).

Enos' knowledge that the Lord *would* keep his promises did not include knowing *when* he would keep them. The peace which Enos enjoyed in knowing that his prayer would be answered was not dependent upon God meeting his timetable.

Knowing that it would be accomplished was enough for him, and his soul was able to rest with that assurance.

9. *Parents in Zion Need to Teach the Gospel to Their Children*

Perhaps if Enos could speak with parents today, he would plead with them to talk often in their homes about the gospel. In the book of Proverbs we read: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6).

The story of Enos is a powerful example of the truth of this principle. Enos wrote: “*The words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart. And my should hungered; and I kneeled down before my maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul*” (Enos 1:3-4; emphasis added).

It was the “words” his father had “often” taught him that motivated him to offer up his mighty prayer, which brought him forgiveness of his sins. Gospel training in the home creates a storehouse of remembrances which can be retrieved to uplift, encourage, and, in some cases, save during critical times.

A key word in this scripture is that Jacob spoke *often* of the gospel in his home. Enos truly obtained the faith of his fathers. This faith is not given genetically, but is bestowed by parents through consistent nourishment in God’s word. Jacob taught his family that the rewards of eternal life and the joy of the saints are the blessings of faith in Christ and obedience to his commandments. When Enos went into the forest, his soul yearned for that joy of which his father had spoken. Often the sermons we hear have no immediate impact, but when we remember them at a later time and under different circumstances, the words “sink deep” into our hearts.

Other Book of Mormon stories support this concept. In relating his conversion story to his son Helaman, Alma said:

And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul. And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, *I remembered also to have heard my father prophecy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.* Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death (Alma 36:16-18; emphasis added).

Again it was the *remembrance* of the words spoken by his father about Jesus Christ and the Atonement that came to Alma as the solution in his time of spiritual crisis.

In the story of the stripling warriors, Helaman questioned his band of 2000 young men as to whether they should assist Antipus in the war against the Lamanites. They responded: “Behold our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall” (Alma 56:46). In describing their extraordinary faith, Helaman said they had rehearsed to him the words of their mothers that “if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47, 48). Remembering the words of righteous mothers helped the stripling warriors develop the faith to fight and provided a catalyst for the miracle of their surviving the onslaught of the mature Lamanite army.

The stories of Enos, Alma the Younger, and the stripling warriors all teach us that children do indeed listen and learn from the spiritual training given by their parents. Parents who want their children to gain testimonies of their own and to translate faith into an active principle in their lives would do well to provide spiritual learning experiences that their children can listen to and collect in their own personal storehouses. I once attended a missionary farewell for an elderly woman, and heard her appreciative son speak of her influence: “I remember the stories my mother told me about living in Mexico. One time the saints needed rain. The members fasted, and during Stake Conference it began to rain. Those types of things have always had an effect upon me. My mother was there—she witnessed it, and that testimony has always been with me.”

We who are parents need to pause and ask ourselves if our children have heard our testimonies. Do they hear them often? Do they know how we feel about Jesus and the Atonement? Have they heard our missionary experiences, and have they heard the testimonies of their aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins?

It may not be so much the particular words that they remember, but it is the spirit that was present when the words were spoken that lasts. It is difficult, if not impossible, to forget the “taste” of the spirit coupled with family love. People go back to a particular restaurant because they remember the taste of the food served there. Individuals often return to the gospel because they remember the sweetness of the training they received as children.

Summary

The Book of Mormon is true; consequently, the book of Enos is true. Enos’ mission, though not fruitful in his own time, has proved beneficial to the Nephite and Lamanite posterity of today in the form of his short but vital message in the Book of Mormon. This “cry from the dust” witnesses of the divinity of Jesus Christ to us today. The book of Enos gives us important “instructions in righteousness” which, if we follow, will bring us nearer to God. His remarkable conversion, his ministry, his life of diligent service, and his proving himself faithful in all things after being “born of the spirit,” all earned Enos the confidence he expressed just prior to writing his last amen:

And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face *with pleasure*, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. Amen (Enos 1:27; emphasis added).

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