

# Living the Lotus 9

*Buddhism in Everyday Life*

2024  
VOL. 228



**Members in the US, and from Japan, Join the 2024 Nisei Week Grand Parade in Los Angeles, August 11**



Photos: Richard Kano

## **Living the Lotus Vol. 228 (September 2024)**

Senior Editor: Keiichi Akagawa  
Editor: Sachi Mikawa  
Copy Editor: Ayshea Wild

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TEL: +81-3-5341-1124 / FAX: +81-3-5341-1224  
Email: [living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp](mailto:living.the.lotus.rk-international@kosei-kai.or.jp)

Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in 1938 by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Rev. Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). With the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai members actively share the Dharma widely and engage in peace activities both locally and internationally in cooperation with people from many walks of life.

The title of this newsletter, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, conveys our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life in an imperfect world to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like beautiful lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. This newsletter aims to help people around the world apply Buddhism more easily in their daily lives.





## Cultivate Your Heart, Unearth Your Buddha Nature

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



### Shakyamuni's Dialogue with the Brahman

In 1998, the year Rissho Kosei-kai marked its sixtieth anniversary, I wrote the following in the magazine *Yakushin* (Kosei Publishing):

When I was a boy, I helped plow the fields. There is a difference between soil that has been tilled and soil that has not. Untilled soil is hard and will not accept anything, but well-plowed soil is soft and absorbs a lot of water and fertilizer. Similarly, a well-cultivated mind is flexible, free of attachments, and can absorb anything honestly, just the way it is.

This is how I explained the importance of every one of us “cultivating our Buddhist hearts,” and this is, as I have already said many times before, based on Shakyamuni’s anecdotes and verses from the Sutta Nipata. Here, let me reintroduce you to its contents.

A brahman, a great landholder, had finished preparing his fields for plowing and was starting to distribute food to the farmhands, when he saw Shakyamuni coming for alms. The brahman asked him, in a stern tone, “Why don’t you also cultivate fields, sow seeds, and then reap some food from your efforts?” Shakyamuni calmly replied to him, “I also cultivate fields and sow seeds.” But the brahman was still skeptical, so Shakyamuni spoke to him in verse:

The seeds I sow are faith, and self-discipline is the rain.  
Wisdom is my plow, and humility is my plow’s shafts.  
The mind is the harness, and reflection is the plowshare and the pitchfork.  
Exercise restraint in body and speech, be moderate in your diet, and do not overeat.  
Upholding the truth is mowing a field of grass.  
Flexibility is removing the yoke from the ox.

Diligence is a load-bearing ox that transports you to a state of tranquility.  
Advancing without retreating, you will reach a place without fear and anxiety.  
Cultivation, done this way, yields the reward of immortality.  
This kind of cultivation frees you from every kind of suffering.

The background of this section of verse is the method of cultivation, in places like India, during Shakyamuni's lifetime. In Japan as well, the plow used to be the primary means of cultivation. Livestock was made to pull a plow to loosen the soil in the fields. Shakyamuni is comparing the plow that breaks apart and loosens the soil in the fields (our hearts and minds) to wisdom, but for the pulling force of the ox, or horse, to be transmitted to the plow and the plow (wisdom) to work sufficiently, the plow must be controlled by the shafts that attach the plow to the ox. According to these verses, "humility is [the] plow's shafts," so your humility allows the plowshare of reflection to reach your mind, and when you forget to reflect upon yourself, you can use the pitchfork to remove clumps of dirt stuck to the plowshare so that wisdom (the plow) will work to its fullest and your heart (the field) will be well cultivated.

### This Is Buddhism in Its Entirety

Shakyamuni adeptly employed skillful means to teach people, in terms easily understandable to them, who were about to start cultivating their fields, that sowing and nurturing the seeds of faith in their minds, and attaining the reward, is just as important as cultivating the earth. The Buddhist scholar Fumio Masutani (1902–87) praised these verses as a wonderful Dharma dialogue, saying that here, Shakyamuni is showing us "the whole picture and essence of Buddhism in a detailed, concrete manner." If the seeds of faith fall into the soil of our minds, we will reach a state of tranquility, without fear and anxiety, and also "be freed from every kind of suffering." Moreover, the wishes of all people who seek such peace of mind, as well as the method for attaining it, are compressed into these short lines of verse, and we can imagine that the many people who received this teaching must have gained the hope to live and the strength to move forward.

If you were to ask, though, whether trying once to cultivate your mind would free you from suffering, I would say I do not think that is the case. I believe it is important to repeatedly cultivate your mind and—time after time—unearth your own buddha nature, which leads directly to peace of mind. And in that vein, in the next issue, we will ponder in greater depth what it means to realize our buddha nature.

From *Kosei*, September 2024



# Interview

## Wishing to Transmit the Buddha's Teachings to Many People in the Bodhisattva Spirit of "Putting Others First"

Mr. Sor Songheng, Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh, Cambodia

**We heard that you were the first member of Rissho Kosei-kai in Cambodia. When and how did you become involved in Rissho Kosei-kai?**

In 2005, the March of Wondrous Dharma took place in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, led by Japanese Nichiren Shu monks. About two hundred participants, including Theravada Buddhist monks from Cambodia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, marched in the city, beating round fan drums and chanting *o-daimoku* to make a powerful appeal for peace in Asia and the world. I participated in this peace march as a volunteer, and I met Rev. Reiji Umetsu, then a member of Rissho Kosei-kai's Commission for Doctrinal Studies, who was visiting Cambodia with Nichiren Shu monks and participating in the march independently as a Japanese Buddhist. I learned about Rissho Kosei-kai and its teachings for the first time from him. Rev. Umetsu has visited Cambodia several times since then and taught me in greater depth about Rissho Kosei-kai and its affiliated Gakurin Seminary. I was attracted by his passion for his faith as well as the profundity of Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings, and in 2010, with the wish to learn more about the teachings, I enrolled in the International Program at Gakurin Seminary.

**What aspect of Rissho Kosei-kai were you most fascinated by?**

I was fascinated by the teaching of "Putting others first" but at the same time greatly shocked by it. Cambodia had been in a state of civil war for many years, so our priority had been to protect ourselves and our own well-being and happiness. So, when I first heard the teaching of "Putting others first" from Rev. Umetsu, I wondered about it. But as I learned more about the teachings, I came to understand that



*Mr. Sor Songheng is interviewed by Living the Lotus.*

"Putting others first" is a bodhisattva's way of life, always wishing to make others happy and putting that wish into practice. I realized that what is important for me is to do something for others, even if it's only a small thing. For example, if someone is carrying a heavy load, I can help them carry it or open the door for them.

**What is your most memorable experience from life at Gakurin Seminary?**

My most memorable experience at Gakurin Seminary was cleaning the toilets. I had never experienced cleaning toilets until I enrolled in Gakurin Seminary. Looking back, I am very grateful that I grew spiritually so that instead of thinking "I was made to clean the toilets," I now think I was given precious experiences. At the time, my lecturers told me that cleaning is a discipline for removing dirt from my mind. True



enough, I remember that after cleaning, I felt the joy of having cleaned the toilets for everyone to use, and I felt refreshed in a way I had never experienced before. I am truly grateful for the two years at Gakurin Seminary, which were a most valuable period, helping me grow as a human being.

**Among the teachings you learned at Gakurin Seminary, is there any specific teaching that you keep in mind in everyday life?**

I value most the teaching of the Eightfold Path in my daily life. The Eightfold Path—namely, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—shows us how to live in accordance with the truth. Conflicts or friction can sometimes happen in our daily lives, whether we are at home, at school, in the workplace, or out in the local community. I believe it is very important to practice the Eightfold Path so that we can live in harmony with people around us. The eight right paths are closely interrelated and all of them are important, but right



*Mr. Songheng with his family.*



*Mr. Songheng (center right, rear) participates in hoza at Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh.*

now I am focusing on practicing right speech by using warm, considerate, and sympathetic words to my wife at home and as a manager of some twenty staff members at my workplace.

**What are some of the current activities of Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh?**

After graduating from Gakurin Seminary in March 2012, I returned to Cambodia, and in July of that year, Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh was established. However, as we did not yet have an official facility, members gathered at my home once a month to participate in *hoza*, or “Dharma circle.” Later, Rev. Masatoshi Shimamura, then assistant minister of Rissho Kosei-kai International of South Asia (now minister of the Uwajima Dharma Center in Japan), began to visit our Dharma center from Bangkok for dissemination once every three months. Rev. Shimamura enhanced our understanding of Rissho Kosei-kai’s teachings through hoza and doctrinal study sessions. At present, we gather for hoza at the Dharma center once a month, and we also hold study sessions about the President’s monthly Dharma talk, during which all participants share their learnings

from the Dharma talk as well as their Dharma experiences in daily life. Currently, Rissho Kosei-kai of Phnom Penh has sixty-eight members.

**While holding a day job, you are also performing the role of area leader. How do you approach your role every day?**

I was given the role of area leader in 2015, and I believe that this role energizes me to perform *tedori*—visiting members’ homes to enhance their connection with the Dharma—as well as to learn the Buddha’s teachings with fellow members in hoza. Social media is certainly an efficient and convenient tool for disseminating information and communicating with members. For me, however, *tedori* is a practice both for improving myself and becoming considerate of others. So, no matter how busy I am with work, I visit members’ homes on my motorcycle as often as possible, asking them how they’ve been doing and how their jobs are going. I’m still short of some qualities as an area leader, but I am giving it my best effort because it’s a precious, joyful role, thankfully received from the Buddha.

**Are there any words of Founder Nikkyo Niwano’s and President Nichiko Niwano’s that support you?**

When Founder Niwano was sixteen years old, he

made the “Six Vows” on the night train to Tokyo. Among the six vows, there is this one: “To work steadily and hard no matter whether others are observing me.” We human beings are inclined to slack off when people are not watching us, but I always keep the Founder’s words, “to work steadily,” in my mind as I work at the company.

As President Niwano always tells us, there is no limit to diligence: “Make an effort, make an effort, I will keep on making an effort until I die, and if I am reborn, I will make an effort again.” I would like to continue to devote myself to the Dharma and develop myself into a cheerful, kind, and warmhearted person.

**Finally, what are your dreams for the future?**

In addition to further committing myself to my role as area leader and other activities of Rissho Kosei-kai, I am hoping to enhance social contribution activities, including the Donate-a-Meal Movement and the donation of school supplies for elementary school students, which I have been involved in for the development of my country, Cambodia. Wishing for the happiness of all the people of Cambodia, I will keep in mind the bodhisattva spirit of “putting others first,” and continue to dedicate myself to spreading the Buddha’s teachings to as many people as possible.



Mr. and Mrs. Songheng visit an elementary school where the students received gifts of school supplies.





# An Introduction to Rissho Kosei-kai Through Comics

## Annual Events of Rissho Kosei-kai

### The Three Major Annual Events of Buddhism

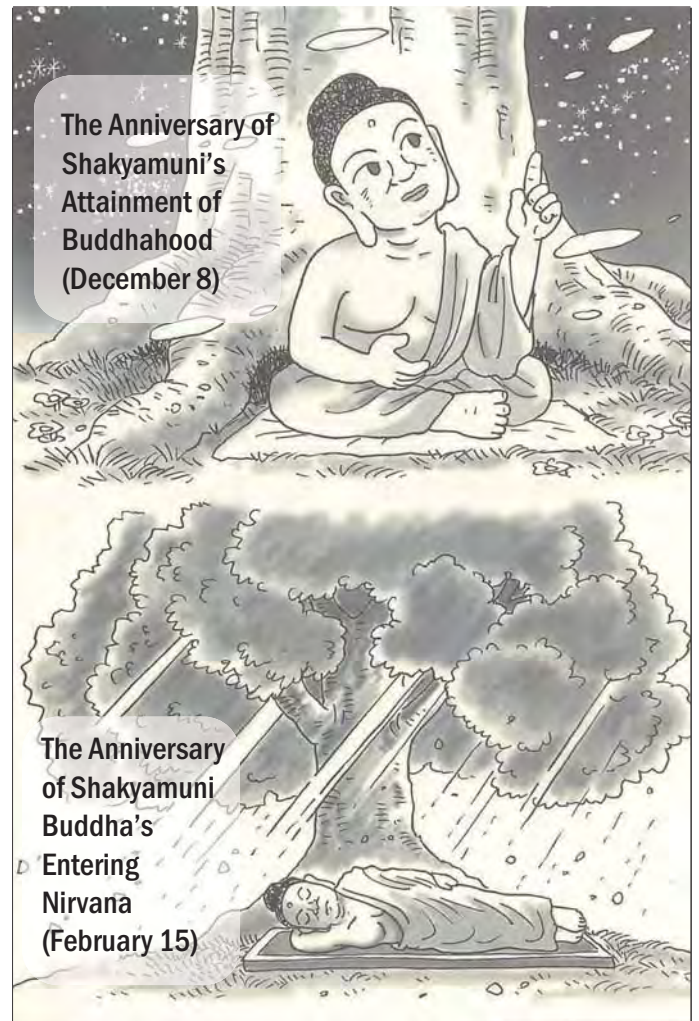
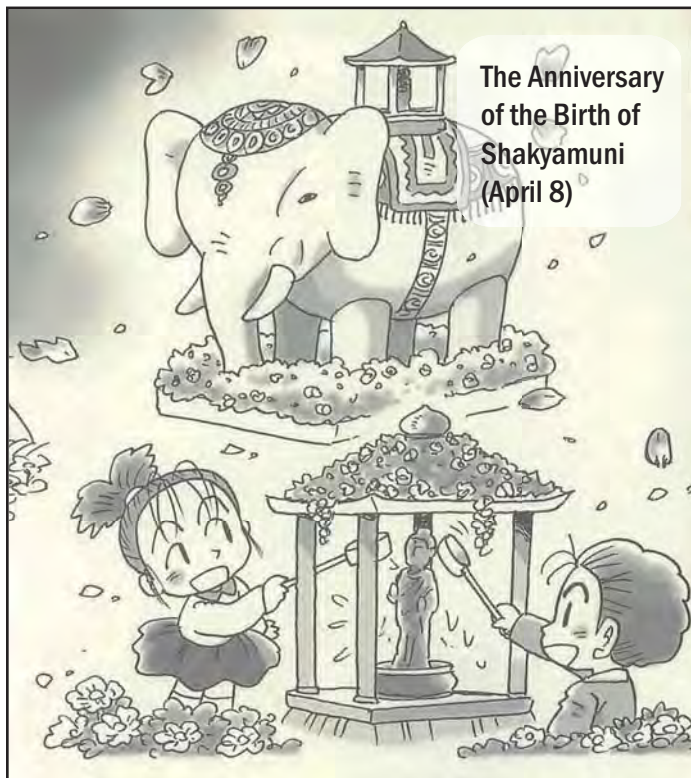
The following are the three major annual events of Buddhism, and Rissho Kosei-kai holds ceremonies for them at the Great Sacred Hall and each Dharma center:

April 8: The Anniversary of the Birth of Shakyamuni

December 8: The Anniversary of Shakyamuni's Attainment of Buddhahood

February 15: The Anniversary of Shakyamuni Buddha's Entering Nirvana

These are the days on which we thank Shakyamuni Buddha, who expounded for us the teaching of the Truth. We also vow to practice the teaching on these days and do something good that will affect many people.



#### Did You Know?

On the occasion of the Anniversary of the Birth of Shakyamuni, we pour sweet tea (an herbal tea made from the fermented leaves of the hydrangea) over the statue of the infant Buddha in a small pagoda decorated with flowers. This custom derives from the tradition that at the moment of Shakyamuni's birth, a dragon descended from heaven and poured fragrant water on the baby Shakyamuni.





## Visit for New Year's Day Worship

January 1 is the day when we rejoice, welcome the new year, and pray for happiness and peace in the year ahead.

In Rissho Kosei-kai, a ceremony is held early in the morning on New Year's Day. Members visit the Great Sacred Hall or their Dharma center to celebrate the new year.

In addition to celebrating the beginning of the new year, we vow to work toward the goal we set for ourselves in front of the *Gohonzon*, or "focus of devotion." This pledge is referred to as *ketsujo*, literally meaning "spiritual resolution" in Buddhist terms.

When we resolve to work hard toward our goal and pray for world peace, we feel refreshed and peaceful.



### Did You Know?

*Ketsujo* also means believing something completely, without doubt or hesitation. Members of Rissho Kosei-kai often use this term. Let us continue, throughout the whole year, to do what we vowed during the visit for New Year's Day worship.





## Chapter 1 Living by Aspiring: Your Point of Departure

### Our Deep Connection with the Buddha

Rev. Nikkyo Niwano  
Founder of Rissho Kosei-kai



#### **After Becoming Aware of Your Connection with the Buddha**

Once you deeply appreciate this precious connection with the Buddha I have described, your way of life should naturally change.

I grew up in a mountain village in snowy Niigata Prefecture, and when I was a child, I would return home covered in snow. My grandfather would embrace me by tucking me inside his padded kimono jacket, warming my ice-cold body. At times like those, he always used to tell me, as though it were a quirk of speech:



“If the members of a family are just working for a living and eating, they are no different from longhorn beetle grubs. Longhorn beetle grubs eat only to survive. Since we are born as human beings, at least one person in the family must become someone who serves society.”

Perhaps because this catchphrase was deeply ingrained in my young mind, I couldn't stand idly by any time I saw someone in trouble and always thought, “I want to do something to help.” Seeking spiritual teachings that could bring happiness to everyone, I encountered the Lotus Sutra and ended up founding Rissho Kosei-kai.

People today are said to be self-centered, thinking only of their own interests. This is probably because they have never savored the joy of working for the sake of others. The joy of helping someone in trouble or offering advice to someone in distress and receiving their gratitude is truly a fulfilling experience. Because of this, we can say that performing actions that bring happiness to others is the quickest way to achieve one's own happiness.

And one more thing to keep in mind is that like us, all the people we encounter also have a karmic connection with the Buddha from past lives. It is said that in our social lives, respecting the humanity of others is important for building good relationships, yet this can be surprisingly difficult. But if you look at others thinking “This person has paid homage to many buddhas in past lives and made great vows,” you will naturally be able to respect them.

Of course, among the people you encounter there may be those who have forgotten the great vows they made in their past lives and are far from the Buddha Way. However, for such individuals, we should work to remind them of their karmic connection with the Buddha. That's why I urge our members to practice “Each person guiding another.”

If human relationships characterized by the understanding that “I am a buddha and so are you” were to spread throughout the world, it would become, even as it is, a realm of peace that Buddhism calls the “Land of Everlasting Tranquil Light.”

I sincerely hope that all of you will take this to heart, strive to put the teachings into practice, and deepen your connection with the Buddha.

*Bodai no me o okosashimu* (Kosei Publishing, 2018), pp. 58–60



## A Journey Back to Shakyamuni's Time

Rev. Keiichi Akagawa  
Director, Rissho Kosei-kai International

In Japan, the summer marked by record-breaking heat and torrential rains has finally ended. Although the heat still lingers, we are now entering autumn, according to the calendar. How is it in your country or region?

In this month's message, President Niwano introduces an anecdote and verses of Shakyamuni Buddha's from the Sutta Nipata and tells us, "I believe it is important to repeatedly cultivate your mind and—time after time—unearth your own buddha nature, which leads directly to peace of mind." The method of cultivation in India during Shakyamuni's lifetime is the background for the verses explaining the importance of cultivating the mind to the brahman, a great landholder.

From April 9 to 22, 2010, as a participant in Rissho Kosei-kai's thirty-fourth pilgrimage to Buddhist sacred sites, I traveled to areas closely associated with the Buddha, mainly in Bihar, northeastern India. The rural scenery out the tour bus windows looked as if we had traveled back to the India of two thousand six hundred years ago, probably because the areas have been spared from modern development in order to preserve important Buddhist sites. It was a stimulating trip that reminded me of the Buddha traveling barefoot to preach the Dharma. Witnessing the vast expanses of farmland, the Buddha's skillful Dharma dialogue in the Sutta Nipata came to my mind with a new sense of reality.

As I read the President's Dharma talk, I looked back on my trip to India and reaffirmed the meaning of cultivating our Buddhist hearts. This month, I would like to spend my days remembering to keep cultivating my mind and unearthing my buddha nature.



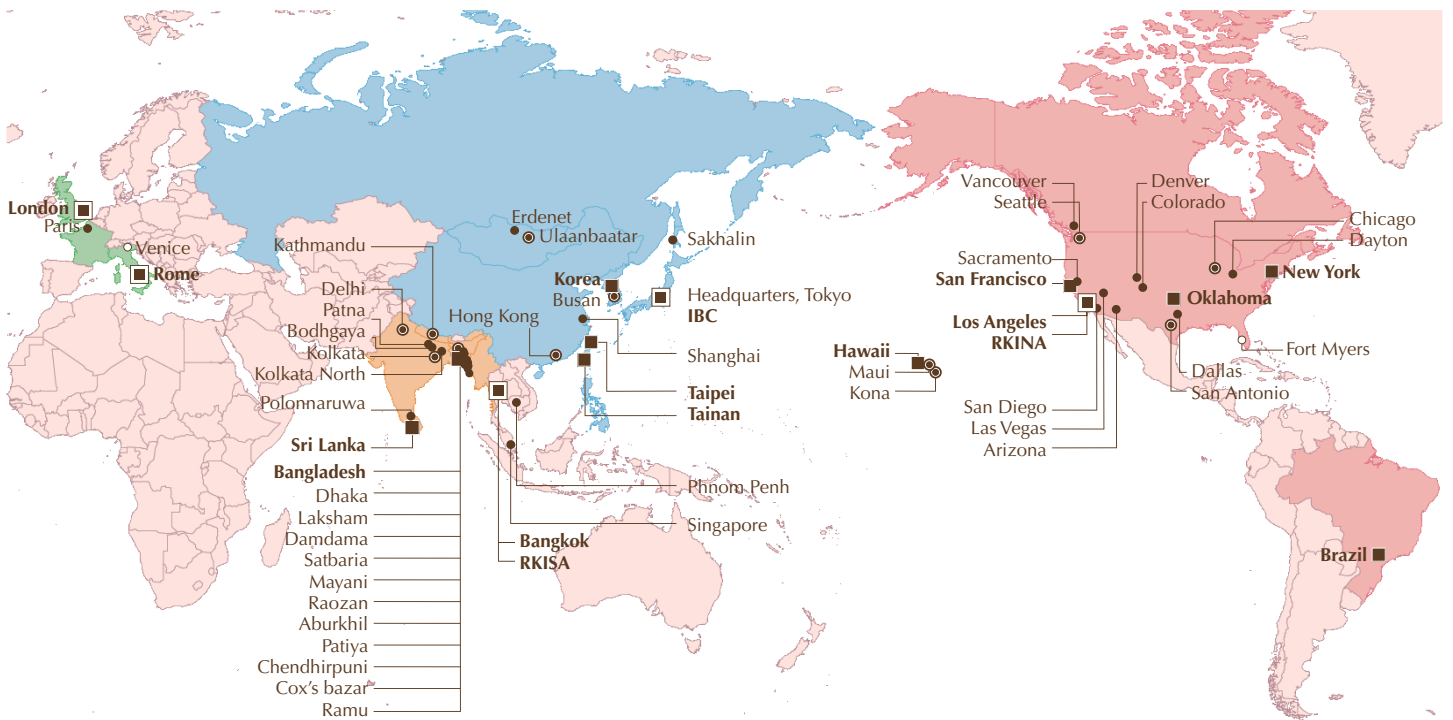
*Rev. Akagawa (front row, center) with participants in the Dharma Teacher Training at Rissho Kosei-kai of Korea on July 14, 2024.*

# Rissho Kosei-kai International

Make Every Encounter Matter



## 🌸 A Global Buddhist Movement 🌸



Information about local Dharma centers



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