

# MARGENSER

Fostering Unity and Carrying the A A Message in Area 29 MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE

## Communication and Participation through the Service Structure

Linda J., Area 29 Delegate

The long form of Tradition One states, in part, "Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare must come first." In other words, each of us must do our small part of this great whole by communication and participation at any and all levels of the A.A. service structure. In order for us to survive we need to learn to communicate with each other. Part of communication is participation. Both are vital "links" at all levels of service.

I first began participating in my home group following my Sponsor around like a puppy. Then she nudged me to take on my own commitments in jails and institutions. I then served at the District level as a G.S.R., Secretary and DCM. I eventually served on and chaired a variety of committees at the Area level in Maryland General Service. I currently serve as your Panel 66 Area Delegate. Service has become a way of life for me. Each of these service positions have been opportunities for spiritual growth within the fellowship and in my personal life.

The theme of the 66th General Service Conference is, "Our Spiritual Way of Life: Steps, Traditions and Concepts". Being connected to the general service structure and the future of an A.A. group is rarely obvious to the members of the group. Demonstrating to the A.A. members that a connection to and

communication within the general service structure is a vital part of their Twelfth Step work can at times prove to be a struggle.

When you stop and think about communication one-on-one with a Sponsee, it's direct, ongoing without an end. We are somehow invested in that suffering alcoholic. At this juncture, it is often difficult to conceptualize how vital communication in the service structure really is to the future of that alcoholic. When we talk about communication at this point, let us all remember that each of us were that "still suffering alcoholic stumbling in the darkness one short block from this room" spoken about by the late Bernard Smith on "Why do we need a Conference?" (p.S20 of the A.A. Service Manual Combined With Twelve Concepts for World Service). He goes on to say that we need the Conference and thus the service structure "to ensure that changes within A.A. come only as a response to the needs and the wants of all A.A., and not of any few...so that anyone who needs us" may find us. And that my friends, begins with both communication and participation.

Communication is critical to the future of Alcoholics Anonymous at all levels of service. We come into the program, begin going to meetings, get a Sponsor and work through the Steps. While working on the Steps and going to meetings, we

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### MARGENSER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Area 29 MARGENSER newsletter is published to foster unity and facilitate communication among AA members, groups, districts, and intergroups within the Maryland General Service Area. The MARGENSER aims to be instrumental in carrying the AA message. This quarterly newsletter seeks to publish AA-related material, including personal stories of experience, strength, and hope. Material will be reviewed by the MARGENSER committee chairperson or by a member of the committee. Nothing published in the MARGENSER should be thought of as a statement of Area 29 or AA policy. Finally, publication shall not constitute endorsement by the newsletter itself, Area 29, intergroups, districts, local groups, or AA as a whole.

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*(Maintaining Anonymity...)* continued from page 1... find that we are part of something larger than us. Yes, that's the Fellowship. Concept I states: "The final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. World Services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship." So why do some think they can wiggle out of that responsibility?

Our GSRs at the home Group level form the first "LINK" in communication through the service structure to the whole of A.A. In the GSR pamphlet, Bill W. says "the strength of our whole A.A. service structure starts with the group and with the general service representative (G.S.R.) the group elects. I cannot emphasize too strongly the G.S.R.'s importance." One of their responsibilities is to inform the group that each person has the right to participate in all of A.A. and share their voice. In getting this word out more participation becomes possible.

The Third Legacy of "Service" is not a requirement for membership, and many members and groups miss out on a multitude of spiritual gifts by not participating. When a group either doesn't elect a GSR or elects a GSR in name only, that group is not connected to A.A. as a whole.

My experience early on in recovery in a home group without an active GSR was I did not know what was going on outside my home group or the groups in "my little world". I had no clue there

was an "A.A. as a whole", much less that there was anything out there beyond my own group which coordinated all the groups in my network into something called a District. I only heard the names Maryland General Service or the General Service Office regarding our group sending contributions periodically.

So, for me, Service was a Secret in the beginning!!! There was no "LINK" to any of the service entities and clearly there was no communication, so we had no way to know we could participate. The most important support any group can give our fellowship is their direct participation in formulating the Group Conscience of A.A. as a whole. Please ask your group's GSR to represent you at the next Area Assembly.

Service work transcends the home group. My experience serving on committees at the Area level over the years taught me that this is where so much of the heavy lifting in Alcoholics Anonymous gets done. Bill provided a working framework through the Twelve Concepts for service work in the sandbox of life. Participation is paramount. Communication is probably the key to attracting more participation. Two-way communication is not only important, it's vital for the service structure to survive.

Travelling around the Area presenting report backs from my first Conference over the past few months, I have begun to see and appreciate more

deeply the love, commitment and responsibility of all those 134 members that served at the 66th General Service Conference. I am also seeing that same love, commitment and responsibility to Alcoholics Anonymous in the eyes and actions of all those who have become willing to participate by serving their fellow alcoholics at the various levels of service in Area 29. My life is being forever changed and enriched by each and every one of you as I travel along this road as your Delegate. The truth is that you can't get to where I am without the help of a loving God as we understand him and superb Service Sponsorship guiding me in service opportunities over the years.

If it feels like something is missing in your life, it may well be that you are not taking advantage of all the free gifts available through the service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous. Availing myself of all the opportunities to be a "...friend among friends, a worker among workers, a useful member of society" has given me a new freedom and a new happiness.

The closing line in the 12th Concept says "to a man, we of A.A. believe that our freedom to serve is truly the freedom by which we live - - the freedom in which we have our being". The Third Legacy of Service allowed me to find this freedom and happiness. Have you found yours???

Thank you for allowing me to serve. 

## **A Matter of Personal Responsibility**

*Don B., Area 29 Chairperson*

Today we live in an age of information overload. Network and cable television, commercial and subscription radio services, and smartphones in nearly every hand have revolutionized our capacity to communicate, to stay informed, and to connect instantly and constantly with others. Not only print, audio, and online books, magazines, newspapers, and

newsletters, but also phone calls, voicemail, text messages, emails, and websites are the commonplace and increasingly outdated currency of our current social order. For now ever-increasing numbers of people, both inside and outside of Alcoholics Anonymous, turn to even more far-reaching forms of social media: Airdrop, Amazon, Delicious, Digg,

Facebook, Facetime, Flickr, Google Plus, Instagram, LinkedIn, Microblogs, Reddit, Skype, StumbleUpon, Twitter, Yahoo, and YouTube, to name but a few – and the list runs into the thousands. All these, and more, are computer-mediated tools which allow people, companies, and other organizations to create,

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*(Personal Responsibility...) continued from page 2...*

share or exchange information, interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in an ever-expanding plethora of virtual communities and networks. We in Alcoholics Anonymous can ill afford to ignore or oppose this rising tidal wave of social media reality, lest it come crashing down upon us with the force to sweep us all away.

The unconditional love of one alcoholic for another is one of the most fundamental and fascinating aspects of our Fellowship, and arguably rivals our desire for self-preservation in its capacity to motivate our individual and collective efforts to carry the A.A. message of sobriety to the alcoholic who still suffers. So it isn't very surprising that alcoholics, now sober and growing into ever-greater responsibilities within our constantly changing world, might crave social interactions with others who also have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. Even those who once considered themselves loners, those whose drinking drove them into isolation, and those who inadvertently or deliberately cut themselves off from family, friends, and society at large may now find themselves desperate to converse with those who have had similar experi-

ences, whether drunk or sober. It is indeed our common solution which binds us together in a way that few, if any, ever dreamed could be possible.

Yet we still have the capacity to be all-or-nothing people, "enthusiasts," as the Big Book calls us. In the area of social media, our natural and God-given desires for sex, security, and society, though, need to be tempered more perhaps than in any other arena, for the consequences of extreme self-will run riot in the social media realm could prove to be extraordinarily far-reaching and maybe even fatally damaging to our whole movement. A recent Delegate to the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous characterized social websites as "akin to walking through a large crowd of unknown people, while speaking privately to friend through a loud amplifier. You will not know what others are hearing, how they are hearing it, or to whom they will repeat it." There is no longer any debate about one key reality – social media platforms and sites are unquestionably AT the level of press, radio and films where 100% personal anonymity must be maintained in order to preserve the integrity of our sole purpose. Who can or even should enforce such a stance?

Our General Service Office is just that – an entity created to provide services to our A.A. groups. So, too, are our intergroups, districts, areas, and the General Service Conference itself. "Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." The only governing body within Alcoholics Anonymous resides in the voice of our collective Higher Power, a loving God whose will is expressed through the decisions of our well-informed group conscience. This means that it is not the duty or responsibility of our service boards or committees to issue orders, dictates or even guidelines for behavior on social media; no, maintaining anonymity on social media is a matter of personal responsibility. Each and every one of us is responsible for learning how to remain anonymous, protect the anonymity of others, and help to educate our peers on the best ways to do all these things. As A.A. co-founder Bill W. wrote in the original Long Form of Tradition Twelve, "...the principle of anonymity has immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility." Anonymity is humility; humility is unconditional love; unconditional love is service; service is gratitude in action. ☺

## Do You Know How Easy it is to Lose Your Anonymity?

Tom M.

We live in a digital age. At the press of a key, we can send messages, photos, and pretty much anything in an instant to a stunning variety of folks – some of who we don't know and will never know. In our eagerness to share, we can forget not to include visual clues and other information that directly ties an individual to our fellowship, thereby breaking their anonymity. We must be extra careful when posting on Facebook or other social media news of our activities.

Sure, we may be proud of the fact that we sponsored a great workshop, or

held a super meeting, but the world doesn't need to know. Remember, we seek to gain people by attraction, not by trumpeting our own accomplishments. Whenever the urge to hit "Send" comes over us, we should ask ourselves the question "Is this post going to violate our tradition of anonymity?" Another question to ask ourselves is "Is there any chance that I am going to disclose something about another person that they would prefer be kept secret?"

If we are not sure, perhaps it is best not to send it. Better we should err on

the side of caution than owe an amend to someone for revealing something about them that wasn't ours to reveal. In this case, it is well to remember that it is better to be careful rather than to have to explain.

Our fellowship is built on mutual support in the battle against alcohol and alcoholism.

We can best advance that fellowship by safeguarding its traditions, and anonymity is foremost amongst them. Remember to be careful, even overly careful and do not succumb to the siren call of self-promotion. ☺

# Why Inventory?

Morgan J.

Several years ago I would occasionally go to a meeting in Area 13 of a group called "Why Inventory?". It met on Wednesdays at 12 noon and on occasion people would actually address the question and add some interesting thoughts to consider.

From time to time there would be some terrific tidbits that would be mentioned that would provide a little more information about the importance of inventories and why they are important to sobriety. One of the first questions discussed was "If we are turning our lives and will over, we need to identify what it is that we are turning over." If we don't

know what we are made of, how can we expect anyone else know? Little progress will occur until this is answered.

In one of my past lives, pre AA, I taught navigation in Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron classes. One of the first questions I would ask the class is: "What is the most important thing to know when you are navigating?" I was always amazed by the number of people who didn't know the answer. The most important thing was you had to know where you are in order to get to where you want to go. If you don't know where you are, then you are lost and being lost at sea can prove fatal.

Good navigators always know where they are. Not only do they start off knowing where they are, but they also make frequent updates as to their progress on their chart. Does this sound familiar? Think about Steps Four and Ten. Four helps us find where we are and ten helps keep us on our course.

Like individuals, groups have to take their inventory as well. First to find out where they are and second to make sure they are on course. Sound familiar? Who answers to the groups? Well around here we call that Maryland General Service of Alcoholics Anonymous (MGS) which is

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## SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO...

In accordance with the 7th Tradition and abiding by the group conscience of your home group, you may send contributions in support of Area 29 to:

Maryland General Service, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2651  
Westminster, MD 21158

# MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE AREA 29 2016 CALENDAR

Saturday  
September 17

Area Committee

Mount Harmony UMC  
155 E. Mt.HarmonyRd.  
Owings, Md. 20736

Thursday -Sunday  
October 7-9

District 31 Camping Trip

Tuckahoe State Park  
13070 Crouse Mill Rd,  
Queen Anne, Md 21657

Saturday  
August 20

Area Inventory Assembly

Severna Park United Methodist Church  
731 Benfield Road  
Severna Park, MD 21146

Friday -Sunday  
October 21-23

32nd Fall Convention

Windham Grand Hunt Valley Inn  
245 Shawan Road  
Cockeysville, Md 21031

*Inventory...)* continued from page 4...

made up of 34 districts, a bunch of committees and five officers.

MGS is just another group with a slightly different configuration from a home group. It has committees (groups) within the Area Committee. Each has its own role to play in maintaining the integrity and vitality of AA and acts independently of the other committees. Like each of us as individuals, groups should also take their inventory on a regular basis. First, to find out where they are and second to see if they are on track.

Area 29 (MGS) takes its inventory every other year. Over the years, I've observed some good ones and some that weren't so good. The worst part was that many times we didn't implement any changes to address the defects and shortcomings we discovered. If we did that

personally we'd get drunk. Remember, "The same person will drink again." Do we wish that for the Area?

How can we prepare for the inventory? Well, a review of the MGS Handbook is a good starting point, and a review of the Concepts can prove helpful, especially Concepts 3, 4, 9 and 10.

Three is the "Right of Decision"; look carefully at whom else might be involved with the decisions, is the committee and/or chair, or is someone else involved?

Four is the "Right of Participation". Does the committee perform the tasks outlined in the Handbook, or are they cutting things short or are they doing things outside their scope. ? This is sometimes referred to as "staying within their lanes". Personally I didn't do a good job in coloring.

Nine is "Good Service Leadership". MGS has lots of leaders, do they lead? Remember what Bill tells us in the Big Book, "We share...". Sometimes good leadership is seen rather than heard. Yes, some e-mails shout.

Ten "Every Service Responsibility should be matched by an Equal Service Authority". Is this back to staying within the lines, well sort of, a clue is there is a group conscious involved.

There are a lot of people involved with the inventory process this year. They are spending lots of time creating questions for the area to address. It should be a good experience this year with lots of soul searching questions to answer. From all this work we should get some good course corrections for MGS, but this won't happen if you aren't there. Please come and participate, your service is needed. ♡

## The Twelve Traditions as Solutions to Barriers to Unity

by Bob C., Area 29 Past Delegate

There's a story about the origin of the Traditions that I've only heard in one place, at a Traditions workshop about ten years back in District 9. It was told by a member from Delaware who put on a great presentation about the Traditions. I haven't been able to verify this story anywhere else, yet it contains the sense of truth, sounds a lot like Bill, and teaches me about the Traditions, so I think it's worth telling.

The story starts with the fact that in late 1944, an A.A. member told Bill about the Washingtonians, a secular society through which alcoholics helped each other stay sober a century before. The Washingtonians grew from six drunks in a Baltimore tavern in 1840, to hundreds of thousands of members within a few years. But after a few years they collapsed as a movement after taking positions on outside issues.

After hearing about the Washingtonians, the story goes, Bill went to the public library and checked out a sociology textbook and a book on

group dynamics, the latter of which was a brand new field with its origin in WWII. As Bill read about how groups behave and how people in organizations get along, he jotted down a list of "Barriers to Unity" for people trying to solve problems together. His "Barriers to Unity" were things that tend to divide organizations as they grow. As Bill read, his list came to look something like this:

### Barriers to Unity

- Importance of Group vs. Individual
- Questions of Authority
- Membership Requirement
- Autonomy – Guarantees & Limits
- Purpose
- Affiliations and Endorsements
- Finance Policy
- Professionalism
- Questions of Governance
- Outside Issues
- Public Relations Policy

If you think about it, all these barriers

to unity are addressed by the first eleven Traditions, even solved by them, assuming we practice them in our group and personal lives. This is especially apparent if we compare the list to the Long Form of the Traditions. The First Tradition tells us that because alcoholism is a fatal malady, we may have to sacrifice the individual to save the group. Tradition Two makes our leaders into trusted servants and places the group conscience under the authority of a loving God who speaks to us through that group conscience. Tradition Three says we're a member if we say so, and no one can overrule that. And so on.

By the time we get to the bottom of the list, we've pretty well covered all the Barriers to Unity that divide people who are trying to work together on common causes. Tradition Twelve summarizes this list of solutions for Barriers to Unity: Personal anonymity, an expression of genuine humility imparted by practicing the other eleven Traditions, ensures an endless continuing growth in the Traditions until we die. ♡

# Maintaining Anonymity on Social Media—A Tall Order or Is It?

Linda J., Area 29 Delegate

The question of anonymity has been around for a long time. Anonymity was important to A.A.'s in 1935. Little or nothing was known about the illness of alcoholism. In the public eye, drunks were synonymous with bums. Few A. A.'s were willing to identify themselves as alcoholics for fear of the consequences. To a large degree, that continues to be true today.

There is considerable service material and other information regarding Anonymity in an increasingly digital world at aa.org, with excerpts from a variety of A.A. resources which can be printed and shared. "Anonymity Online" (SMF-197), "Understanding Anonymity" (P-47), "AA Guidelines on the Internet" (MG-18) and numerous other items are all downloadable at the aa.org website. All of these would be great handouts to copy and distribute far and wide in the Alcoholics Anonymous fellowship.

Here are just a few questions and answers of shared experience from the GSO Public Information Desk that are available in our literature on the topic of Anonymity.

**Q: Why is Anonymity important in A.A.?**

**A:** In A.A., our Traditions urge members to maintain anonymity regarding their membership in A.A. for three reasons, as described in our wallet card "What Does Anonymity Mean to A.A.?"

1. We have learned from our own experience that the active alcoholic will shun any source of help which might reveal his or her identity.

2. Past events indicate that those alcoholics who seek public recognition as A.A. members may drink again.

3. Public attention and publicity for individual

A.A. members would invite self-serving competition and conflict over differing personal views.

**Q: Is it an anonymity break to tell people I am a sober alcoholic?**

**A:** On page 11 of our pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" the following suggestion can be found:

"AA members may disclose their identity and speak as recovered alcoholics, giving radio, TV and Internet interviews, without violating the Traditions – so long as their A.A. membership is not revealed."

**Q: Is it O.K. for A.A. members to be involved in lobbying for new legislation?**

**A:** As an organization, Alcoholics Anonymous would not be involved in such efforts. On page 157 of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions an account of the lessons learned from A.A. early attempts to enter such public discussions is provided:

"...we saw ourselves getting married to all kinds of enterprises, some good and some not so good. Watching alcoholics committed willy-nilly to prisons or asylums, we began to cry, 'There oughtta be a law!' A.A.'s commenced to thump tables in legislative committee rooms and agitated for legal reform. That made good newspaper copy, but little else. We saw we'd soon be mired in politics...These adventures implanted a deep-rooted conviction that in no circumstances could we endorse any related enterprise, no matter how good."

**Q: Is it O.K. for an A.A. member as an individual citizen to be**

**involved in such efforts?**

**A:** As stated above, so long as membership in A.A. is not disclosed, recovering alcoholics may speak of their recovery and sobriety without breaking their anonymity. In Tradition Ten, on pages 176-177 of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions we can find the following suggestions:

"As by some deep instinct, we A.A.'s have known from the very beginning that we must never, no matter what the provocation, publicly take sides in any fight, even a worthy one (...)

Let us re-emphasize that this reluctance to fight one another or anybody else is not counted as some special virtue which makes us feel superior to other people. No does it mean that the members of Alcoholics Anonymous, now restored as citizens of the world, are going to back away from their individual responsibilities to act as they see the right upon issues of our time. But when it comes to A.A. as a whole, that's quite a different matter. In this respect, we do not enter into public controversy, because we know that our Society will perish if it does. We conceive the survival and spread of Alcoholics Anonymous to be something of far greater importance than the weight we could collectively throw back of any other cause. Since recovery from alcoholism is life itself to us, it is imperative that we preserve in full strength our means of survival."

In closing, Tradition Twelve states "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personali-

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*Maintaining Anonymity...*) continued from page 6...

ties." Many folks have difficulty with being anonymous. Some even act as if they don't know what to do if their phone has low reception or the internet is down and they can't see "what's happening" on FB or Twitter. Or even worse aren't able to "post" something in real time.

Thus it seems maintaining Anonymity appears as a definite TALL order in our ever changing digital world where social media seems to run folks lives. Does it have to be like that?? I think not.

Potentially our best move going forward toward a solution is just how we can best use social media in a humble way? In Tradition One, we are told "our life actually depends upon obedience to spiritual principles." We are also told in Tradition One "as a small part of a greater whole; that no personal sacrifice is too great for preservation of the Fellowship." The Twelve Traditions repeatedly ask us to give up a little of ourselves for the good of the whole. Tradition Twelve states that "the spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice."

So I would suggest all members of the Fellowship ask themselves this question regarding anonymity: "What sacrifice do I need to make for the common welfare of the entire fellowship?" Also remember to keep in mind those who are afraid of approaching the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous for fear of being exploited in some way through social media?

I'm thinking for the sake of A.A.s future, we had best lead by example. Let us all remember that Anonymity is so **FRAGILE**, you can break it with one finger!!! ☹

## My Username is . . . and I'm an Alcoholic

*Briefly Examining the Ill-Advised Mix of Social Media and Anonymity*

Mike M.

A local member of Alcoholics Anonymous (speaking on condition of anonymity) recently remarked that while a scientist by trade, he is "first and foremost an artist." The two disciplines, he said, co-exist without a conflict of interest. The same cannot be said, however, with respect to social media and the principle of anonymity.

Billed as "the spiritual foundation" of AA's traditions, anonymity emphasizes "principles before personalities." Because AA is based on "attraction rather than promotion," members should maintain anonymity "at the level of press, radio and film." Social media is clearly at the level.

### Conflicting Ideals

Unlike AA, Facebook and like plat-

forms encourage individualism and self-promotion rather anonymity. Such sites, which often exist for personal and/or promotional purposes, garner much of their revenue through the sale of users' personal information for advertising.

### Inadvertent Disclosures

While some AA members may choose to break their own anonymity via social media, others inadvertently risk their anonymity being broken simply by being linked to or associated with such members. It is not uncommon for social media users within AA to be connected to overlapping networks of other members, as well as friends, family, and professional associates who are not AA members.

### Broader Implications

On a larger scale, a major risk associated with the use of social media is the posting of content that can reflect unfavorably on AA as a whole. Social media inherently conveys information about one's personality, values, and priorities.

Often, the first impression generated by this content can be lasting. Perceptions of AA may be based on information in a single social media profile, such as photos, posts, and comments liked or shared.

By making public posts, one has willingly made information available for anyone to view. For some viewers, it logically follows that AA members who don't use discretion in deciding what content to post are representative of AA itself. ☹

## THE MARGENSER IS YOUR NEWSLETTER

The MARGENSER Committee welcomes submissions. We are here to serve you. Submissions should be no more than 750 words and about service or recovery. Please include your first name, last initial and home group. Email all correspondence to Margenser@marylandAA.org or mail to Maryland General Services, PO Box 2651, Westminster, MD 21158. The submission deadline for the next issue is October 20, 2016.

## REACHING OUT TO THE "DARK DISTRICTS"

Many of our neighbors do not actively participate in Area 29, nor are their voices heard within AA as a whole. We encourage you to reach out to those districts without active GSRs or DCMs, sharing your experience of service beyond the home group and carrying the message one-on-one. Area 29 welcomes your ideas on how we can best do this and offers our support.

# MARGENSER

P.O. Box 2651  
Westminster, MD 21158



Return Service Requested

**MARGENSER** Mailing List Update Form

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