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BIBLICAL STORIES FOR CHILDREN: VALUE POTENTIAL

БІБЛІЙНІ ІСТОРІЇ ДЛЯ ДІТЕЙ: ЦІННІСНИЙ ПОТЕНЦІАЛ

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Abstract. The article examines biblical stories for children as a specific type of children's literature whose content possesses significant moral and value potential. Particular attention is paid to the textual structure of biblical narratives, their themes, subject matter, imagery, and ways of representing fundamental human values. The study analyzes how the concepts of good and evil, love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, responsibility, justice, mutual respect, and helping others are revealed through plot situations, characters' actions, moral conflicts, and their resolution within the text. It is emphasized that the value potential of a biblical story is determined not only by its instructive content but also by the artistic representation of moral choice, which enables children to comprehend the characters' behavior, motives, and consequences of their actions. Particular importance is attached to the characters through whom different models of behavior and moral choice are presented to the child. The article also considers the role of dialogic interaction, emotional richness, and a child-accessible narrative form in revealing the value-based meanings of the text. It is substantiated that biblical stories for children can be viewed not merely as adapted literary material but as a meaningful space for the formation of an individual's moral and value orientations. The study concludes that the textual content of biblical stories is significant for developing children's ability to comprehend moral situations, relate the actions of literary characters to their own experiences, and develop a humanistic attitude toward other people and the surrounding world.

Keywords: biblical stories, children's literature, literary text, value potential, moral values, moral education, child, personality.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational landscape is characterized by an increased focus on the development of an individual's value orientations, their spiritual and moral development, and their ability to consciously determine their own behavior in situations involving moral choices. These issues take on particular relevance in the context of the transformation of Ukrainian society, military challenges, social instability, and the need to support children's psychological and moral resilience. In such conditions, methods that are capable not only of conveying certain moral norms to children but also of creating conditions for them to emotionally experience, reflect on, and gradually transform these norms into personal convictions take on great importance. One such method is children's literature, particularly biblical texts adapted for children's understanding.

Biblical stories for children constitute a distinct genre of literature in which a narrative form is combined with a clear ethical and spiritual message. Their educational value is determined not only by the themes of the stories but, above all, by the way moral situations, the characters' personalities, their actions, motives, and the consequences of their choices are portrayed. Through specific images and events, children are invited to reflect on such fundamental concepts as good and evil, love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, justice, responsibility, honesty, faithfulness, gratitude, humility, mutual aid, and respect for others. At the same time, the biblical story is not reduced to direct moralizing: its educational impact is largely realized through the plot, characters, dialogue, conflict, emotional experience, and the connection between the described situation and the child's own life experience (Bible Stories for children, 2022).

The relevance of this study is heightened by the fact that contemporary children's literature operates in a context of changing reading practices, the digitization of the information space, and the transformation of ways in which text is perceived. Under these circumstances, it is particularly important to examine not only the use of biblical narratives in children's literature but also the specific values embedded in the text, the literary devices through which they are represented, and how they can be applied in the educational process. This requires shifting the research focus from a general definition of the educational role of religious literature to a textual analysis of specific biblical stories, their plot and compositional structure, their system of characters, moral dilemmas, and ways of modeling value choices.

This issue takes on particular significance in the context of the New Ukrainian School, whose conceptual foundations call for an educational approach focused on the development of a well-rounded personality, the cultivation of key competencies and cross-cutting skills, and a values-based attitude toward oneself, other people, society, and the world. In this regard, Bible stories for children can be viewed as a textual resource for developing moral reflection, empathy, the ability to recognize moral dilemmas, articulate one's own position, and recognize responsibility for one's

own actions. At the same time, their use in the educational process requires a pedagogically balanced approach that takes into account children's age-specific characteristics, cultural context, and the principles of voluntariness and respect for diversity of worldviews.

The scholarly interest in this issue is also driven by the need for a comprehensive understanding of biblical history as a text that functions simultaneously in literary, cultural, ethical, and pedagogical dimensions. While a literary approach makes it possible to identify the distinctive features of a text's artistic structure, a pedagogical analysis allows us to trace how its content can contribute to the formation of a child's value orientations. It is precisely at the intersection of these approaches that the opportunity arises to more deeply explore the potential of biblical stories as a component of children's reading and a means of spiritual and moral development (Bible Stories for children, 2022).

Thus, a pressing research problem is to identify and theoretically substantiate the value-based potential of Bible stories for children through an analysis of their content, system of moral categories, characters, plot situations, and models of character behavior, as well as to determine the possibilities for pedagogically actualizing these values in work with children. Resolving this problem will contribute to deepening scientific understanding of the educational potential of children's literature and to substantiating effective ways of using value-rich texts in the modern educational environment.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this article is to reveal the value-based potential of Bible stories for children through an analysis of their content, plots, character portrayals, moral conflicts, and behavioral models. Particular attention is focused on how love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, responsibility, mutual aid, courage, and hope are represented in specific biblical texts and how these values can be actualized in the educational process of the New Ukrainian School. A separate objective is to identify opportunities for using biblical stories within the framework of educational theory and modern educational technologies in the New Ukrainian School, taking into account the educational realities of Ukraine in the context of war.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS.

The issue of the values conveyed in children's literature, its educational potential, and its applicability in the educational process is a focus of attention for contemporary Ukrainian and international researchers. Contemporary studies of children's literature are interdisciplinary in nature and encompass textual, literary, cultural, pedagogical, psychological, and receptive aspects of its interpretation. As noted by T. Kachak and T. Blyznyuk, contemporary research on children's literature

focuses not only on individual works and the creative output of writers, but also on theoretical generalizations, genre and thematic phenomena, characteristics of reception, and methodological approaches to the analysis of children's texts (Kachak & Blyznyuk, 2024).

T. Kachak's monograph "Trends in the Development of Ukrainian Prose for Children and Adolescents in the Early 21st Century" is of great importance for defining the theoretical foundations of this study, in which Ukrainian literature for children is examined as a distinctive artistic and aesthetic phenomenon. The author focuses on the thematic, genre- and style-related, imagery-based, and other characteristics of prose for children, which lays the groundwork for further analysis of children's texts not only as a means of conveying information but also as an important factor in shaping readers' experiences and value orientations (Kachak, 2018).

Of significance to contemporary literary discourse is the study by T. Kachak and T. Blyznyuk, "Research of Children's Literature in Ukrainian Scientific Discourse", which systematizes the main trends in Ukrainian research on children's literature. The researchers emphasize the importance of combining literary and didactic approaches, as well as the use of textual, narratological, receptional, and other methodological tools. Of particular importance to our study is the assertion regarding the necessity of a systematic analysis of the poetics of a literary work, since it is precisely the textual organization that determines the specifics of its reception and interpretation by the reader (Kachak & Blyznyuk, 2024).

H. Kulchak and T. Kachak directly address the issue of the relationship between children's literature and Christian education in their work «Children's Literature as a Means of Shaping Christian Values in Younger Schoolchildren.» The researchers view children's literature as a means of fostering Christian values, analyze the required and supplementary works recommended for elementary school students, and identify the value components represented in the respective texts. Particular attention is paid to the possibility of translating the content of a literary work into the realm of pedagogical work through specially designed exercises and tasks (Kulchak & Kachak, 2021).

A separate area of research focuses on Christian values as the foundation for the spiritual and moral upbringing of children. K. Zakharova and L. Kobyletska argue for the importance of Christian values in shaping a child's spiritual and moral qualities, particularly kindness, honesty, and love for one's neighbor. In their more recent studies, the authors focus particularly on the study of biblical texts in the process of developing moral qualities in preschool-aged children, which attests to the relevance of turning to the biblical text as a source of spiritual and moral content (Zakharova & Kobyletska, 2018).

The pedagogical dimension of the issue is expanded by studies devoted to the integration of Christian moral values into the modern educational environment. (Kopchuk-Kashetska & Mosiychuk, 2025) view Christian moral values as a key

factor in shaping a spiritually and morally grounded, responsible, and patriotic personality within the context of the New Ukrainian School. The authors emphasize the need to find effective ways to implement moral values in the modern educational process.

At the same time, the contemporary paradigm of education is represented by the content of the courses "Theory of Education" and "Contemporary Educational Technologies in the New Ukrainian School" and emphasizes the child's agency, the personal significance of educational content, dialogic interaction, reflection, and the active internalization of values. In this regard, it is important to move beyond simply conveying a specific moral norm to a child and instead create conditions for the child to independently comprehend, emotionally experience, and practically apply that norm. Thus, a literary text can serve not only as an illustration of a particular moral thesis but also as a basis for posing probing questions, analyzing moral dilemmas, engaging in discussions, role-playing scenarios, and creative and reflective tasks.

This issue takes on particular relevance in the context of the war in Ukraine. Contemporary research shows that, despite the hardships of war, Ukrainian children's literature, reading practices, and scholarly studies continue to develop; at the same time, the interpretation of texts related to war-related themes is becoming a key area of focus. Under these circumstances, there is a growing need for texts capable of fostering moral resilience, compassion, mutual aid, responsibility, humanity, and hope. Biblical stories for children, which place significant emphasis on moral choices, trials, mercy, forgiveness, love for one's neighbor, and overcoming difficult life circumstances, can be viewed as one of the resources for such values-based education.

O. V. Ogirko's work "Christian Pedagogy as the Pedagogy of Love" is of significant theoretical importance for the study of the value potential of biblical stories. The author views Christian pedagogy as a system for shaping an individual's spiritual and moral life based on absolute values, emphasizing the interconnection between spiritual and moral education. At the heart of the concept proposed by the author lies love as the fundamental virtue of education, manifested in the desire to do good to one's neighbor, respect for human dignity, mercy, mutual aid, and a responsible attitude toward others. Among the principles of Christian pedagogy, O. V. Ogirko highlights nonviolence, a personalized approach, respect for human dignity, and the unity of pedagogical influences (Ohirko, 2019).

O. V. Ogirko's views are particularly significant for our study, as they allow us to view Bible stories for children not merely as texts with religious or cultural content, but as value-oriented material in which fundamental moral categories are revealed through the plot, the characters, and their actions. Love, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, helping one's neighbor, responsibility, and respect for human dignity – defined in Christian pedagogy as important guiding principles of upbringing – are directly reflected in the content of biblical stories. That is why the concept of Christian pedagogy as the pedagogy of love can serve as a theoretical foundation for

analyzing how the biblical text represents moral values and creates opportunities for children to reflect on them.

These principles take on particular relevance in times of war, when education must be directed not only toward the internalization of moral norms but also toward the preservation of humanity, the capacity for compassion, mutual support, mercy, and a responsible attitude toward others. In this regard, O. V. Ogirko's idea of love as the foundation of Christian education takes on special pedagogical significance, as it allows for the realization of the humanistic potential of biblical stories in working with children who live in the complex social and psychological realities of wartime (Ohirko, 2019).

Thus, an analysis of scholarly works confirms the existence of in-depth research on children's literature, Christian values, spiritual and moral education, and the integration of values-based content into the New Ukrainian School (NUS) educational process. At the same time, the issue of the value-based potential of biblical stories adapted for children's reading remains under-researched from the perspective of a comprehensive analysis of their text and the possibilities for their pedagogical application in modern educational practices, especially in the context of war. This highlights the need for further research into the content of Bible stories for children, the system of values presented in them, the ways in which these values are artistically represented, and the pedagogical possibilities for their use in the educational process of the New Ukrainian School.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The methodological foundation of this study is based on the principles of educational theory regarding the formation of personal values, the child's agency in the educational process, the interconnection between moral knowledge, emotional experience, and practical behavior, as well as the principles of modern NUS pedagogy regarding child-centeredness and competency-based, activity-based, and value-oriented approaches.

To achieve the objective, a set of interrelated methods was employed. Textual analysis was used to determine the content of biblical stories, the characteristics of their plot structure, the system of characters, moral conflicts, and the ways in which values are represented. Content analysis made it possible to identify recurring value-based meanings and behavioral models presented in biblical narratives. The comparative method was used to contrast different situations involving moral choices and the ways in which characters resolve them. The hermeneutic method made it possible to interpret the content of biblical stories, taking into account their moral, ethical, and educational significance. Pedagogical analysis was applied to identify opportunities for incorporating the identified values into the educational process in the NUS elementary school.

Particular attention is paid to analyzing not only the value conveyed by the biblical text, but also how exactly that value is portrayed in the text: through a specific action, a moral choice, the relationship between one character and another, the development of a conflict, and its resolution. This approach makes it possible to move beyond a general characterization of biblical stories as "morally instructive" texts to a substantive analysis of their value-based potential.

PRESENTATION OF THE MAIN MATERIAL

In today's educational landscape, children's literature takes on special significance as a means not only of fostering a child's reading, language, and intellectual development but also of shaping their value system. Biblical stories for children occupy a special place in this context, as they combine artistic narrative, moral and ethical themes, imagery, and spiritual content. Their educational potential is determined not only by their themes but, above all, by the text itself: its plot, cast of characters, the personalities of the protagonists, their actions, moral choices, conflicts, and ways of resolving problematic situations.

The focus of this study is the publication "Bible Stories for Children" (Ukrainian Bible Society, 2022), in which biblical stories have been adapted for children. According to the publisher, the stories were selected with the aim of helping young readers understand and experience the idea of God's love for humanity.

It is important to emphasize that adapting biblical material for children is not merely a matter of mechanically abridging the original text. A children's Bible story requires a specific textual organization of the material that takes into account the reader's age, the accessibility of the vocabulary, the clarity of the plot, the vividness of the characters, and emotionally rich situations. This is precisely why Bible stories can be viewed as a specific genre of children's literature, in which fictional narrative serves as a means of bringing complex spiritual and moral concepts closer to a child's experience (Bible Stories for children, 2022).

Above all, the value-based potential of Bible stories is revealed through the plot. Unlike the abstract proclamation of a moral norm, the plot makes it possible to demonstrate it in action. The child observes how a character faces a choice, makes a decision, experiences its consequences, and interacts with other people. Thus, moral value emerges not as a theoretical definition, but as part of a concrete life situation.

An important example of revealing value potential is the story of "The Good Shepherd". The image of the Good Shepherd is revealed through his attitude toward the sheep: "The Good Shepherd is ready to lay down his life for the sheep" (Bible Stories for children, 2022). This quote conveys the ideas of care, responsibility, and a willingness to protect others. Its meaning is emphasized by contrasting it with the hired hand, who, in a dangerous situation, "runs away, leaving the sheep to fend for themselves" (Bible Stories for children, 2022). Thus, the value of care is revealed through the characters' specific actions and their moral choices, which makes the

spiritual and moral content accessible to children's understanding. Thanks to due to this, children not only become familiar with the biblical image of the Good Shepherd but also have the opportunity to see a concrete model of responsible behavior toward those who need protection and support.

It is best to reveal the moral potential of Bible stories for children primarily through a direct analysis of the text. In this case, moral value emerges not as an external characteristic of the Bible story, but as a meaning that takes shape through the plot, the characters' actions, their relationships, and their moral choices. That is precisely why those biblical stories in which a certain value is not merely stated but is revealed through a specific action are particularly instructive.

One of the most striking examples is the parable of the Good Samaritan (The Bible, 2011). Its text is built on the contrast between three models of behavior. The priest and the Levite see the wounded man but pass him by. The Samaritan, however, does not remain a passive observer: «When he saw him, he was moved with compassion", after which he "bandaged his wounds", "took him to an inn, and cared for him".

In this passage, the value of mercy is revealed through a sequence of concrete actions. The Samaritan does not limit himself to compassion as an emotional reaction. He approaches the victim, provides assistance, ensures further care, and even covers the financial costs. Thus, the text shifts the concept of mercy from the realm of emotion to the realm of behavior. This is precisely what is important for an educational reading of the story: the child sees not merely a statement about the need to "be good", but a concrete model of how goodness is put into practice.

The conclusion of the parable deserves special attention: "So go and do likewise". This brief line changes the purpose of the entire preceding narrative: the story the reader has just heard becomes a moral challenge for the reader. In an educational context, this opens up the opportunity to ask students questions such as: What does it mean to help someone who finds themselves in a difficult situation? Is it enough to simply notice another person's problem? Why did some characters walk by, while another stopped? In this way, the text creates a situation of moral choice that can be explored further through discussion, role-playing, or analysis of real-life situations.

Another example is the parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the focus shifts to the issues of forgiveness, acceptance, and the restoration of relationships. It is important that the text does not merely state that forgiveness has occurred. It illustrates it through the father's encounter with his son, who has come to realize his own guilt. The son says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son". In response, the father does not reject him, but commands, "Bring the best robe and put it on him", and explains his reaction with the words: "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (The Bible,2011).

The moral potential of this text unfolds through the dynamic of sin – realization – repentance – forgiveness. It is particularly important that the older son is also present in the story; he does not accept his father's decision and expresses resentment. Thus, the parable is not reduced to a simple "wrongdoing – repentance – forgiveness" formula. It raises complex questions about justice, jealousy, resentment, brotherly relationships, and the willingness to accept a person after they have erred. For pedagogical analysis, this creates an opportunity to view forgiveness not as a formal cancellation of guilt, but as the restoration of relationships.

Particularly valuable for working with children is the comparison of the two perspectives – that of the father and that of the older son. The older son assesses the situation from the standpoint of justice: he believes that the one who erred should not receive the same acceptance as the one who remained obedient. The father, on the other hand, emphasizes his son's return. Thus, a single text allows us to explore several moral concepts at once: forgiveness, justice, love, responsibility, repentance, and acceptance of others.

The parable of the unforgiving debtor (The Bible, 2011) deserves special attention. Its uniqueness lies in the contrast between the mercy received and the mercy shown. At first, the master «had mercy» on the servant, "released him, and forgave him the debt". However, afterward, the servant himself encounters his fellow servant, who asks him for patience but does not show him the same mercy. It is precisely on this contradiction that the moral conflict of the parable is built.

Particularly striking is the master's remark: "Shouldn't you also have shown mercy to your fellow servant, just as I showed mercy to you?" In this case, the text shows that a value cannot remain merely an experience one has received. If a person has received forgiveness themselves, this raises the question of their attitude toward others. Thus, the parable allows us to view mercy and forgiveness as interrelated values that must be manifested in behavior.

A comparison of these three biblical stories reveals different ways in which values are presented in the text. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, mercy is shown through action – the protagonist stops, helps, and takes responsibility for the victim. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, forgiveness is shown through the acceptance of a person who acknowledges his mistake. In the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, the value is revealed through moral contrast: the protagonist himself receives forgiveness but fails to apply this experience to his own relationships with others.

It is precisely these textual mechanisms that are important to consider during the pedagogical analysis of Bible stories. Their value is shaped through action, choice, conflict, and consequence. Therefore, when working with the text, it is advisable to focus not only on the question "What is the main idea of this story?" but also on more specific questions: "Who made a choice?", "What was the protagonist's problem?", "What action changed the situation?", "How did the other character feel?", "What were the consequences of the protagonist's decision?"

This approach aligns with educational theory, since moral values are viewed not as a ready-made formula that a child must memorize, but as content that is internalized through action and moral choice. A biblical story becomes material for moral reflection precisely when a child has the opportunity to evaluate an action, justify their own position, and relate the situation to their own experience.

Within the framework of modern educational approaches in the New Ukrainian School, such texts can serve as the basis for moral dilemmas, discussions, role-playing, storytelling, situational analysis, and reflective exercises. For example, after reading the parable of the Good Samaritan, students can be asked to role-play a situation in which a classmate needs help. After studying the parable of the Prodigal Son, discuss whether forgiveness means a lack of responsibility for one's own actions. After reading the parable of the Unmerciful Debtor, ask students to determine why the forgiveness the character received did not change his behavior.

Such work takes on particular significance in times of war, when issues of aid, support, compassion, responsibility, and human dignity cease to be merely theoretical concepts. However, it is precisely here that we must maintain a text-centered approach and pedagogical caution: we should not mechanically superimpose modern experiences onto biblical narratives, but rather allow the child to independently establish a connection between the story they have read and their own life. For example, the story of the Good Samaritan can serve as a basis for a conversation about helping someone in distress; the story of the Prodigal Son – for reflecting on forgiveness and the restoration of relationships; and the parable of the Unmerciful Debtor – for a discussion about responsibility for how a person treats others after having received help themselves.

Thus, an analysis of specific biblical stories shows that their value lies not only in the final moral lesson. It is shaped by the entire structure of the narrative: the situation the protagonist finds himself in; his reaction; his choice; his action; his attitude toward another person; and the consequences of that action. It is precisely these specific textual details that allow us to view Bible stories for children as material for values-based education, rather than merely as a collection of moral lessons.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the biblical texts presented in the Bible (The Bible, 2011) and their adaptation for children in the publication "Bible Stories for children" (Ukrainian Bible Society, 2022) provides grounds for considering biblical stories as a specific genre of children's literature that combines an accessible narrative form with spiritual and moral content. A comparison of the original source and the children's adaptation shows that values are conveyed through the plot, the cast of characters, their actions, moral conflicts, and the choices and consequences of their decisions.

It has been established that values in biblical stories are represented not only through their direct proclamation but, above all, through specific models of behavior. An analysis of the parable of the Good Samaritan showed that mercy is revealed through helping others and a willingness to act; the parable of the Prodigal Son highlights the interconnection between forgiveness, love, repentance, and acceptance; the parable of the Unmerciful Debtor illustrates the interdependence between mercy received and mercy shown toward others. The values conveyed in the texts under consideration are shaped by specific situations and the moral choices made by the characters.

It has been established that action, choice, conflict, and consequence are important mechanisms of value representation. This textual structure allows children to follow the development of a moral situation, compare the behavior of characters, reflect on the motives behind their actions, and relate them to the consequences. Consequently, a biblical story can facilitate the transition from passively accepting a ready-made moral lesson to independently reflecting on it.

Thus, the Bible as a primary source (The Bible, 2011). and its adaptation for children in the publication (Bible Stories for children,2022). provide a substantive foundation for exploring moral and value-related issues in children's reading. The value-based potential of such texts lies in their ability to help children reflect on mercy, love, forgiveness, responsibility, justice, and helping others through concrete characters, actions, and plot situations. We see prospects for further research in the analysis of other biblical narratives and textual means of representing values, as well as in identifying methodological possibilities for using biblical stories in the upbringing of children and the educational process of the New Ukrainian School.

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У статті розглянуто біблійні історії для дітей як особливий тип текстів дитячої літератури, зміст яких характеризується значним морально-ціннісним потенціалом. Основну увагу зосереджено на текстовій організації біблійних оповідей, їхній тематиці, проблематиці, образній системі та способах репрезентації базових людських цінностей. Проаналізовано, як через сюжетні ситуації, вчинки персонажів, моральні конфлікти та їх розв'язання в тексті розкриваються поняття добра і зла, любові, милосердя, співчуття, прощення, відповідальності, справедливості, взаємоповаги та допомоги ближньому. Акцентовано, що ціннісний потенціал біблійної історії визначається не лише її повчальним змістом, а й художнім способом репрезентації морального вибору, який дає дитині можливість осмислювати поведінку героїв, мотиви їхніх учинків та їхні наслідки. Особливе значення мають образи персонажів, через які дитині пропонуються різні моделі поведінки й морального вибору. Розглянуто роль діалогічності, емоційної насиченості та доступної для дитячого сприйняття форми оповіді у розкритті ціннісних смислів тексту. Обґрунтовано, що біблійні історії для дітей можуть розглядатися не лише як адаптований літературний матеріал, а як змістовний простір формування морально-ціннісних орієнтацій особистості.

Зроблено висновок про значущість змісту біблійних історій для розвитку здатності дитини осмислювати моральні ситуації, співвідносити вчинки персонажів із власним досвідом і формувати гуманістичне ставлення до інших людей та навколишнього світу.

Ключові слова: біблійні історії, дитяча література, художній текст, ціннісний потенціал, моральні цінності, моральне виховання, дитина, особистість.

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