The Easiest Way to Learn Greek Grammar

# Sing and Learn New Testament Greek

Kenneth Berding



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## This project is dedicated to my daughter Grace, who grew up singing these songs.



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#### - Introduction -

"There has to be an easier way!"

All Greek students have either said or heard this while studying Greek. I said it. I still say it almost every day. But why?

I was required to memorize more than fifty different paradigms during my introductory Greek study. Fifty!!!

What's a paradigm? A "paradigm" is a pattern of forms found in a language. Here's a simple example from Greek:

λύω λύεις λύει λύομεν λύετε λύουσι(ν)

That's only *one* paradigm! I had to learn more than *fifty* (when I also count all the noun, adjective, article, and participle patterns that I learned).

"There has to be an easier way!" (Now you're saying it!)

There is.

Sing and Learn New Testament Greek is a much easier way to learn Greek grammar forms. You can't learn Greek without some memorization of forms. But it is always easier to learn through music. Always. In addition, things learned through music are not quickly forgotten. Paradigms learned through rote memory are. (Take a minute and try to remember the paradigms you learned for high school French, Spanish, or German!)

In addition, it is difficult to actually bridge the gap between a memorized paradigm and the form that appears before your eyes on the page of your New Testament. The conceptual distance between the songs presented here and the Greek forms you will actually encounter as you read is much shorter. Apart from the *Prepositions Song*, the longest song takes no more than fifteen seconds to sing through once you know it well. Thus, connecting what you see on the page to what you have memorized is significantly eased.

Linguistic purists may not appreciate this approach. It only covers perhaps 90 percent of all the grammar forms you'll encounter while reading the New Testament. But would you rather *remember* 90 percent or *forget* 95 percent? It also gives the forms as they *appear* rather than as they mutated somewhere in ancient Greek history. Again, the linguists may be unhappy.

This approach is for those who are simply trying to learn to read the Greek New Testament and use it in ministry. It is not the program for the linguistically particular. If you enjoy the niceties of grammar and the intricacies of language, you'll face no dearth of books to guide you. But that's not the aim here.

In one sense, I'm uniquely qualified to attack the problem of Greek grammar memorization. I had to learn Greek *twice*. I learned it once as a Greek minor during my undergraduate studies. I then spent quite a few years in intensive study of modern spoken Turkish while living in Turkey. I lost much of my ability in Greek through the pressures of learning Turkish. So I had to relearn Greek. In the process, I decided that I would learn how to teach Greek while I was relearning it. Since I generally knew what was coming but wanted a way to remember what I was learning over the long haul, I was motivated to find a new way through the maze that would help me easily learn the material in a way that I wouldn't forget it. The result is what you see here.

It has required a significant amount of time and energy to create patterns that would connect Greek grammar to music. I have been humming these tunes (and hundreds of rejected tunes) since 1992. I have worked on these songs in Turkey, California, Pennsylvania, Ukraine, and New York. They have been my

constant traveling companions. I even once successfully taught an introduction to Greek in Kiev (through Russian translation!) using an earlier version of some of these songs.

Many of the songs were difficult to develop (such as the *Participles Song* and the *Indicative Verb Endings Song*). The *Alphabet* and *Article Songs* use standard charts (though they still each needed a tune). Some aspects of these songs represent true advances in pedagogical method. I have my father (an engineer) to thank for teaching me that it is easy to make things more complex but you have truly succeeded if you can make something simpler.

Some may object to using folk and children's tunes. I seriously considered—and even began—composing new music for each chart. But the familiar songs have the psychological advantage of already being known and of making you feel that what you are doing is easier. These songs are also easier for teachers to use.

This program is meant to function as a supplement to other books. These songs can supplement any beginning grammar book or program. You simply memorize the songs in place of the paradigms you are told to memorize in whatever book you are using to learn Greek. Teachers can feel free to pick and choose if they would rather use a different approach in place of one or more of the songs.

All songs are sung across from left to right. The left to right approach will make it feel like you are singing a song from a piece of music. By the way, you do not have to sing these charts. (I mean ... if you want to be a stick in the mud!) You still will be greatly benefited by memorizing these charts rather than memorizing paradigms. And it's OK to sing a little when nobody's listening!

As to the pronunciation of the "omicron" (a regular point of discussion among teachers of Greek), a sound in between the "alpha" and the "omega" has been employed. This will allow the student to distinguish these vowels from one another.

By way of appreciation, I should mention the labor of love of those who have been my Greek teachers and mentors along the way, in particular Ed Goodrick (now with the Lord), Rex Koivisto, Joe Hellerman, Walt Russell, Clint Arnold, Mike Wilkins, Dan McCartney, Moisés Silva, Steve Taylor, and Vern Poythress. Rick Lepage made early versions of these charts attractive and let me try them out while tutoring him in Greek many years ago. Thanks also are due to David Huttar, who made many helpful suggestions during my days at Nyack College in New York.

My daughter Grace (at age 12) deserves appreciation for suggesting the English Alphabet Song as the tune for the *Alphabet Song*. (This tune may seem obvious [!], but I didn't make the connection for twelve years! By the way, I am also aware that the tune for the *Alphabet Song* and for *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* is the same tune—though most people are not aware of it.) My wife, Trudi, and my older daughter, Lydia—along with Grace—let me try out tune after tune on them. Thank you!

I owe a debt of gratitude to Kyle Bonenberger, who helped me record a demo CD of these songs, and Jon Mathew, who sang on that CD. Dwayne Condon arranged and recorded the tracks for this new recording, and Steven Harms skillfully sang each song; I so appreciate both of them sharing their musical skills. Finally, special thanks are due my Elementary Greek classes at Nyack College and Biola University for letting me try out new songs on them. The first Greek class that actually used rough versions of some of these songs—the Greek *aa* section at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, 1998–1999—is deserving of special appreciation for bearing with me. Together we filled Westminster's hallowed halls with the sounds of children's tunes.

## Alphabet Song

Sing to the tune of The Alphabet Song

α, A (alpha)	$\beta$ , B (beta)	γ, Γ (gamma)	$\delta, \Delta$ (delta)	$\epsilon, E$ (epsilon)	
ζ, Z (zeta)	η, Η (eta)	$\theta$ , $\Theta$ (theta)	ι, I (iota)		
κ, K (kappa)	$\lambda, \Lambda$ (lambda)	$\underset{(mu)}{\mu,M}$	v,N (nu)	ξ, Ξ (xsi)	o, O (omicron)
π, Π (pi)	ρ, P (rho)	$\sigma \zeta, \Sigma$ (sigma)	τ, T (tau)	$\nu, \Upsilon$ (upsilon)	
$\phi, \Phi$ (phi)	χ, X (chi)	ψ, Ψ (psi)	$\omega,\Omega$ (omega)		

"This is the Greek alphabet!"

## - Article Song -

Sing to the tune of *Three Blind Mice* 

		Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
S I	Nominative	ó	ή	τό
N G	Genitive	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ
U L	Dative	$ au\hat{\omega}$	τῆ	$ au \widehat{\mathbf{Q}}$
A R	Accusative	τόν	τήν	τó
P	Nominative	oi	αί	τά
L U	Genitive	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
R A	Dative	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς
L	Accusative	τοῦς	τάς	τά

## Noun Endings Song ~

Sing to the tune of *The Farmer in the Dell* or *A Hunting We Will Go* 

	1st Dec		2nd Dec		3	rd Declensior	n
	Femi	nine	Masculine	Neuter	Masc./Fem.	Neuter	also
Nominative	α	η	ος	ον	-	-	
Genitive	ας	ης	ου	ου	(τ)ος	(τ)ος	εως, ους
Dative	ά	η	φ	φ	(τ)ι	(τ)ι	ει
Accusative	αν	ην	ον	ov	(τ)α	-	ν
Nominative	αι	αι	οι	α	(τ)ες	(τ)α	
Genitive	ων	ων	ων	ων	(τ)ων	(τ)ων	
Dative	αις	αις	οις	οις	σι(ν)	σι(ν)	
Accusative	ας	ας	ους	α	(τ)ας	(τ)α	

Note: The  $(\tau)$  in the 3rd declension represents either  $\tau$ ,  $\delta$ , or  $\kappa$ , letters commonly occurring in the 3rd declension.

### Indicative Verb Endings Song

Sing to the tune of Yankee Doodle

		Singular				Plural	
	1	2	3		1	2	3
Present (A) Future (A) [+σ]	ω	<b>εις</b> [ᾳς] [οῖς]	<b>El</b> [ậ] [oî]		μεν	τε	σι(ν)
	μι	ς	σι(ν)		μεν	τε	ασι(ν)
Present (M, P)	μαι	η	ται		μεθα	σθε	νται
Future (M, P) [ $+\sigma$ for middle] [ $+\theta\eta\sigma$ for passive]	μαι	<sup>[οί]</sup> σαι	ται		μεθα	σθε	νται
Perfect (M, P) [redup.]							
Imperfect (A) [augment]  Aorist (A)  [2 Aorist augment + stem change] [1 Aorist augment +σα]	Ο <b>V</b> [ων] [ουν]	<b>ες</b> [εις] [ους]	ε(ν) [α(ν)] [ει(ν)] [ου(ν)]		μεν	τε	Ο <b>V</b> [ων] [ουν]
Perfect (A) [redup.] + κα	α	ας	ε(ν)		μεν	τε	<b>αν</b> {σι(ν)}
Imperfect (M, P) [augment]	μην	ου	το		μεθα	σθε	ντο
Aorist (M) [2 Aorist augment + stem change] [1 Aorist augment +σα]	μην	<b>ω</b> {σο}	το		μεθα	σθε	ντο

- Key: [] = difficult contract forms (see contract forms song);
   {} = alternate forms; (v) = moveable "nu";
   (A)=Active, (M)=Middle, (P)=Passive.
- 2. Aorist Passive (not found in song) = augment +  $(\theta)\eta v$ ,  $(\theta)\eta \varsigma$ ,  $(\theta)\eta$ ,  $(\theta)\eta\mu e v$ ,  $(\theta)\eta \tau e$ ,  $(\theta)\eta \sigma \alpha v$ . Notice the similarities to the imperfect endings.
- 3. Subjunctives: Present Active, Aorist Active  $(+\sigma)$  and Aorist Passive  $(+\theta)$  are similar to line 2, but "lengthened". (See the  $\epsilon i \mu i$  chart subjunctive line for exact endings.) Present Middle/Passive and Aorist Middle subjunctive follow line 3 with "filler letter" lengthened.

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### General Verb Forms Song

Sing to the tune of I've Been Workin' on the Railroad

Sigma  $(\sigma)$ , the symbol of the *future*But not if a liquid verb  $\theta\eta\sigma$  the *future passive* marker  $\kappa\alpha$  the *perfect* active sign<sup>1</sup>

 $\sigma \alpha$  is a orist active / middle  $\alpha$  if a liquid verb  $\theta \eta$  the a orist passive marker, but not for second a orist verbs

Augment if it's *aorist*, *imperfect* or *pluperfect*<sup>2</sup>
The *perfect* and *pluperfect* can reduplicate
If you see ντ, μενο, μενη, ουσα, οτ
A *participle* is your fate!

## Participles Song ~

#### Sing to the tune of Old McDonald Had a Farm

Tense and Voice	Case & Number	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Present (A) Future (A) [+ σ]	Nom. Sing.	ων	ουσα	OV # 1
2 Aorist (A) [stem change]	Gen. Sing.	οντος 1	ουσης ΄	οντος
Continue followin	g Noun Declension:	3	1	3
1 Aorist (A)	Nom. Sing.	σας	σασα	σαν
Thomse (II)	Gen. Sing.	σαντος	σασης (	σαντος
Continue followin	g Noun Declension:	3	1	3
Perfect (A) [reduplication]	Nom. Sing.	κως	κυια	κος
Terrett (1) (redupritudin)	Gen. Sing	κοτος	κυίας	κοτος
Continue followin	g Noun Declension:	3	1	3
Aorist (P) 1 Aorist (P) [with $\theta$ ]	Nom. Sing.	(θ)εις	(θ)εισα	(θ)εν
2 Aorist (P) [stem change; no $\theta$ ]	Gen. Sing	(θ)εντος	(θ)είσης	(θ)εντος
Continue followin	g Noun Declension:	3	1	3
Aorist (M) [1 Aorist +σα]	Nom. Sing.	μενος	μενη	μενον
[2 Aorist = stem change + o]	Gen. Sing.	μενου	μενης	μενου
Present (M, P) [+ 0] Future (M, P) [Future (M) + \sigma 0]		2 Continue followin	1 g Noun Declension:	2
[Future (P) + $\theta\eta\sigma$ o] Perfect (M, P) [reduplication]		form	e: The Present A ss of εἰμί are the ent Active Partici	same as the

(row one above).

<sup>1.</sup> For  $\mu \iota$  verbs  $\kappa \alpha$  could be an aorist rather than a perfect indicator.

<sup>2.</sup> The augment only occurs in the indicative.

## - Infinitives Song -

Sing to the tune of For He's a Jolly Good Fellow

	Active	Middle	Passive
Present (on stem) Future (+ $\sigma$ )	ειν	εσθαι	εσθαι
1 Aorist (on stem)	σαι	σασθαι	θηναι
2 Aorist (changed stem)	ειν	εσθαι	ηναι
Perfect (reduplication)	κεναι	σθαι	σθαι

Note: Notice that all infinitive forms end either in ειν or αι.

## Imperatives Song

Sing to the tune of Row, Row, Row Your Boat

		Present Active (2 Aorist Active)	1 Aorist Active	Aorist Passive	Present Middle	Present Passive	1 Aorist Middle
Singular	2	ε	(σ)ον	(θη)τι	ου	ου	(σ)αι
gular	3		τω		σθω		
Plural	2		τε σθε				
ral	3		τωσαν			σθωσαν	

Notes: 1. ( $\sigma$ ) stands for  $\sigma\alpha$  or  $\sigma$ , the aorist active/middle indicator.

2.  $(\theta\eta)$  is the aorist passive indicator.

## Contract Forms Song(Difficult Forms Only)

Sing to the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Indicative			"Difficult Contract Forms"				
Pre	Active	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Singular	$\hat{lpha}\varsigma$		οῖς	"think" <b>εις</b>
Present	Active Mid./Pas.	$\begin{array}{c} 3^{rd} \\ 2^{nd} \end{array}$	Singular Singular	â		οî	"think" $\epsilon \iota / \eta$
Im	Active Active	$1^{st} \\ 3^{rd}$	Singular Plural	ων		ουν	"think" <b>OV</b>
Imperfect	Active	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Singular	εις		ους	"think" <b>ες</b>
3	Active	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Singular	$\alpha(v)$	ει(ν)	ου(ν)	"think" $\varepsilon(v)$
				If	you see	2	think

Note 1: These are just the difficult-to-recognize forms. Other contracted forms are easily recognizable, though connecting letters will often look different.

Note 2: Specifically, if you see  $\hat{q}$  think (only)  $\epsilon\iota$ ; if you see  $o\hat{\iota}$  think *either*  $\epsilon\iota$  *or*  $\eta$ .

## - Eiµí Song - (Important Forms)

Sing to the tune of *Mexican Hat Dance* 

	1	Singular 2	3	1	Plural 2	3
Present Indicative	εἰμί	εἶ	ἐστί(ν)	ἐσμέν	ἐστέ	εἰσί(ν)
Imperfect Indicative	<b>ἤμην</b>	ής	η̈́ν	ήμεν (ήμεθα)	ἦτε	ἦσαν
Future Indicative	ἔσομαι	ἔση	ἔσται	ἐσόμεθα	ἔσεσθε	ἔσονται
Present Subjunctive	ŵ	ἦς	ή	ὦμεν	ἦτε	ὧσι(ν)

Extra notes: 1. The Active Infinitive form of εἰμί is εἶναι.

- The Participle forms of εἰμί look like the present active endings in the participle song (first box).
- 3. The Present and Aorist Subjunctive endings of  $\lambda \acute{\nu} \omega$  are identical to the Present Subjunctive forms of  $\epsilon i \mu i$  .

## Prepositions Song ~

Sing to the tune of Joshua Fit' the Battle of Jericho

#### With One Case

#### Chorus:

ἀντί	with genitive	instead of, for
ἀπό	with genitive	from, away from
είς	with accusative	into, in
ἐκ	— genitive	from, out of

#### Verse:

ἐν	with dative	in, among, by
πρό	with genitive	before, ahead
πρός	with accusative	to, toward, with
σύν	— dative	with, along with

Note: The "dashes" in place of the word "with" are only there to help you sing with the music.

#### With Two Cases

#### Chorus:

διά	with genitive	through, throughout
διά	with accusative	because of
κατά	with genitive	against, down from
κατά	— accusative	according to

#### Verse:

μετά	with genitive	with, along with
μετά	with accusative	after, behind
περί	with genitive	concerning, about
περί	— accusative	around, about, near

#### Chorus:

<b>ὑ</b> πέρ	with genitive	on behalf of
<b>ὑ</b> πέρ	with accusative	above, beyond
υπό	with genitive	by (means of)
νντό	— accusative	under, below

#### With Three Cases Verse and Ending:

	e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e e		
ἐπί	with genitive	on, over, when	
ἐπί	with dative	on the basis of	
ἐπί	with accusative	on, against	
παραί	— genitive	from (someone)	
παραί	— dative	beside, with	
παραί	— accusative	alongside	

## - A Few Notes on Using These Songs -

These songs are intended to supplement an elementary Greek textbook and simplify the learning process. They are not intended to be a stand-alone program. If you are studying Greek on your own, compare what you see in these songs (i.e., on these charts) to the paradigms—or patterns—you are told to memorize in whatever textbook you have decided to use to learn Greek. Memorize these songs in place of the paradigms or charts you have been told to memorize. If you are learning with a teacher, *do whatever your teacher instructs you to do.* Below are a few notes on how to use these songs.

- 1. Alphabet Song: Just learn it and use it.
- 2. Article Song: Again, just learn it and use it.

#### 3. Noun Endings Song:

- Most of the song is self-explanatory. When reading Greek, you will encounter nouns that have one of the endings found on this chart. Use the chart to determine the noun's case, gender, and number.
- Note that in the third declension column, there are three points where
  a dash (-) is found in place of an ending. This indicates that there are
  quite a variety of endings you might encounter that would fit in this
  box.
- Notice that there is an "...also" column. Though not sung in the song, this column picks up some of the more common extra forms (though not all) found in the 3<sup>rd</sup> declension.
- The parenthesis around the  $(\tau)$  means that the  $\tau$  stands in for the letters  $\tau$ ,  $\delta$ , or  $\kappa$ , letters commonly (but not always) occurring in the 3rd declension. Knowing that those letters are commonly found in the

- third declension can often help you recognize that the noun you are looking at is in the 3rd declension.
- The parenthesis around the "nu" (v) in the dative plural of the 3rd declension is a "moveable nu," which means it is sometimes there and sometimes not.

#### 4. Indicative Verb Endings Song:

- Please note the comments at the bottom of the song. Those comments will not be repeated here.
- When you are reading Greek, you will encounter verbs that have one of the endings found in this song. When used in conjunction with the *General Verb Forms Song*, you can usually figure out how to parse (that is, identify the tense, voice, person, and number) of whatever indicative verb you encounter.
- If your goal had been to learn to *speak* or *write* Greek, you would need to know specifically which endings went with which tenses. But if your goal is simply to learn to *read* Greek, it is adequate to group, say, all the present, future, and perfect middle/passives together on the chart as has been done here. It is much simpler to memorize this way, and my goal is that you remember over the long-term, not simply to pass a test.
- 5. General Verb Forms Song: This song includes the most common ways that tenses are formed, and also includes signals that you have encountered a participle. This song will help you organize lots of miscellaneous information about indicative verbs and participles that you will only learn gradually as you work through your Greek textbook

#### 6. Participles Song:

- Follow the arrows to sing this song. The reason for the layout of this chart is that you need to know *both* the nominative singular form of a participle (since nominative singular participles are *very* common) *and* the genitive singular form of the participle, because the genitive form shows you what the rest of the forms will look like.
- Pretend that you are using a computer and "clicking" to open a menu. The menu has eight items in the list, but only the first two actually are displayed (i.e. the nominative and the genitive singular forms). When you click on the number immediately below these two forms, the other six forms open. The other six forms will be similar to the genitive singular, <sup>1</sup> and will follow the noun declension pattern that is listed with a number in the song.
- So, for example, look at the top left box. You find  $\omega v$  there (the nominative singular form). Just below it is  $\text{ovto}\zeta$  (the genitive singular form). And just below that is a "3." If you "click" on the "3," the other six forms "open" (that is, the dative and accusative singular, and the nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative plural forms). These other six forms will follow the 3rd declension pattern found on your *Noun Endings Song*. That's why the number "3" is there. Use your *Noun Endings Song* to identify what the other forms are. All eight forms, then, would be  $\omega v$  ovto $\zeta$  ovtu ovte $\zeta$  ovt $\omega v$  ovov ovtu ovtav since they follow the third declension of the noun endings.
- Note that the chart includes what you actually *see*. Thus, the 1st Aorist Active includes the σα on the chart, and so on. This song is trying to help you recognize and parse *what you actually encounter*.

<sup>1.</sup> Except for the Dative Plural, which always looks a little different. Consult your Noun Endings Song.

- 7. Infinitives Song: Just learn it and use it.
- **8. Imperatives Song:** This song is straightforward. But be aware that for lines 2, 3, and 4, those lines not only include present forms (where you will find the ending added directly to the stem), but also include aorist active forms (where a  $\sigma\alpha$  is found between the verb stem and the ending) and aorist passive forms (where a  $\theta\eta$  is found between the verb stem and the ending).

#### 9. Contract Forms Song (Difficult Forms Only):

- Most approaches to learning Greek require that you learn a number of *rules* for how to form endings on contract verbs (i.e. verbs with lexical forms ending in  $\alpha\omega$ ,  $\epsilon\omega$ , or  $\omega$ ). This song simply gives you a list of the forms that are hardest to recognize. All other forms are easily recognizable; so really you do not need to learn all the rules for contract forms if your aim is to simply learn how to read your Greek New Testament. This chart will help you to deal with *most* of the difficult changes you will encounter.
- What the chart means is this: [If you see]  $\hat{q}\zeta$  [or]  $\hat{o}\hat{i}\zeta$ , [then think]  $\hat{\epsilon}\hat{i}\zeta$ . That is, if you see either  $\hat{q}\zeta$  or  $\hat{o}\hat{i}\zeta$  on the end of a verb, then treat it as if it were the  $\hat{\epsilon}\hat{i}\zeta$  in your indicative verb song. Since  $\hat{\epsilon}\hat{i}\zeta$  in the indicative verb song is present active 2nd person singular, then so are  $\hat{q}\zeta$  or  $\hat{o}\hat{i}\zeta$ , which look unusual to us because they are forms of contract verbs.
- 10. **Eiµí Song (Important Forms):** Just learn it and use it. By the way, the Mexican Hat Dance is a combination of two traditional Mexican songs, Jarabe Tapatio and La Raspa. (La Raspa gave us the "da-Dum da-Dum" at the beginning of the song.)
- 11. Prepositions Song: Just learn it and use it.

#### - A Note to Teachers -

I recommend that you regularly sing the songs in class together with your students. If you are not as comfortable singing, you can ask some of your more musical students to help you. In class, you do not need to use the CD; just sing the songs. You will do well to have your students learn a particular song *before* you begin teaching that point of grammar. Students can be quizzed by having them reproduce the entire chart out of their heads (not just the section of the chart that they sing).

Use a little bit of class time each day for singing the songs they have learned so far. You should keep singing the songs with your students in class as long as they are learning elementary Greek. When your students are first learning a song, sing it more slowly; later vary the speeds. Also, have them *chant* the songs without music faster and faster in class until they can do them *very* fast. Actually, if you are less comfortable singing in class, you can let them learn with music outside of class and only chant in class.

Eventually, your goal should be that they can speak/chant through all but the prepositions song in *90 seconds* by memory. By the way, enjoy using these songs! Your students certainly will appreciate them.

We want to hear from you. Please send your comments about this book to us in care of zreview@zondervan.com. Thank you.



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