

37. Psalms III-III5

Praying Psalm III with Jesus



Albrecht Alt: Jude mit Torah

This is a meditative hymn of thanksgiving for what God has done.
Since God's covenant (verses 5 and 9) endures for ever (verses 3, 5, 8 and 9), so must our praise (verse 10).

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

I give thanks to GOD with all my heart,
in the assembly of the upright.

²Look at what GOD has done.

Reflect upon it with admiration.

³Glorious and majestic are the deeds of GOD,
whose justice endures forever.

⁴Who can fail to acclaim GOD's wonderful deeds?

GOD is gracious and tenderly compassionate,

⁵nourishing the faithful, ever mindful of the covenant,

⁶demonstrating mighty deeds,

giving them a land, the heritage of the nations.

⁷GOD's deeds are according to truth and right judgment.

All GOD's precepts can be trusted.

⁸Enacted in justice and truth,
they are established forever.

⁹GOD has redeemed the chosen people,
ratifying the covenant for all time.

Holy and awesome is GOD's name.

¹⁰Reverence for ['fear of'] GOD is the beginning of wisdom.

Wise are those who live this way.

Praise of GOD will continue forever.

1. Praying this psalm with Jesus, we think of his words at the Last Supper. Having broken bread to share with his friends his body, about to be broken in death, Jesus shared a cup of wine with them. But it was more than a cup of wine: 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20).

Jesus had given himself to them all through their life together. Now, his life was about to be violently taken from him. He wanted his disciples to know that he would never stop loving them. He would always be with them. He would make, even of his dying, a gift of himself, and so a gift of God, for them – what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews calls 'the new and eternal covenant' (Hebrews 13:20).

Christ is 'the mediator of a new covenant' (Hebrews 9:15). His gift brought to its fulfilment all the ancient promises given by God. 'Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant' (Hebrews 7:22).

God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah: 'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts and I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (Jeremiah 31:33). This promise is quoted by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, who sees it fulfilled in Jesus (Hebrews 8:10).

The covenant is 'new', not in the sense that God's commitment has changed – God's commitment has always been absolute – but in the sense that, at last, a member of the human race, Jesus of Nazareth, welcomed God's commitment with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. And so he was able to show us, in a human way, how absolute is God's commitment to us. Furthermore, he loved us so convincingly, that he showed us how to respond to God. He shared his Spirit with us, so that we would be able to respond with his response.

For the same reason Jesus could say: 'A new commandment I give you: love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34).

Paul speaks of Jesus as 'the last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45), the 'man of heaven' (1 Corinthians 15:47). 'Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Corinthians 15:49).

Paul writes: 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17), and 'a new creation is everything' (Galatians 6:15).

Thanks to Jesus we are able to witness God's absolute commitment to us, and, because we share Jesus' Spirit (his love-communion with God) we are able to welcome God's commitment, and respond by loving God and each other with Jesus' love. God's unconditional commitment to love is absolute. The covenant is 'new' because our response to God's commitment is new.

2. The psalmist claims that 'Fear of GOD is the beginning of wisdom' (verse 10). The psalmist is speaking of a gift from the Spirit of God: a gift of a profound sense of awe in the presence of the sacred, and a humble recognition of our fragility, and the possibility of separating ourselves from God's love by our sinful behaviour.

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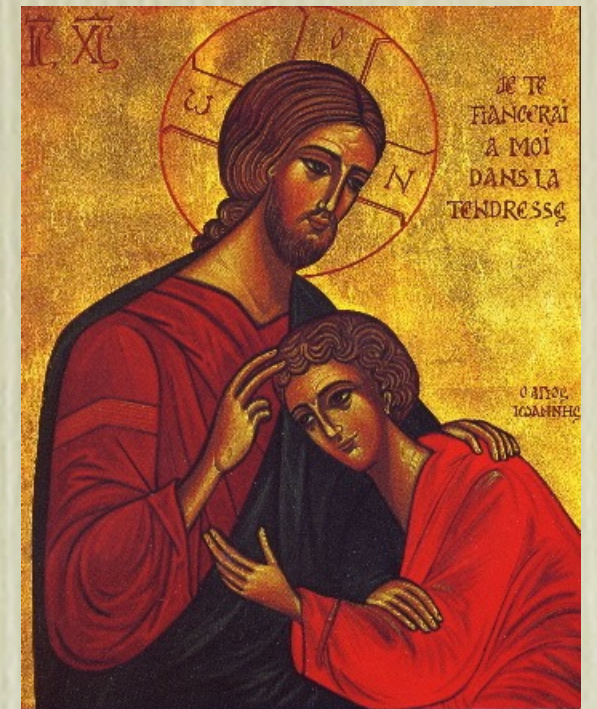
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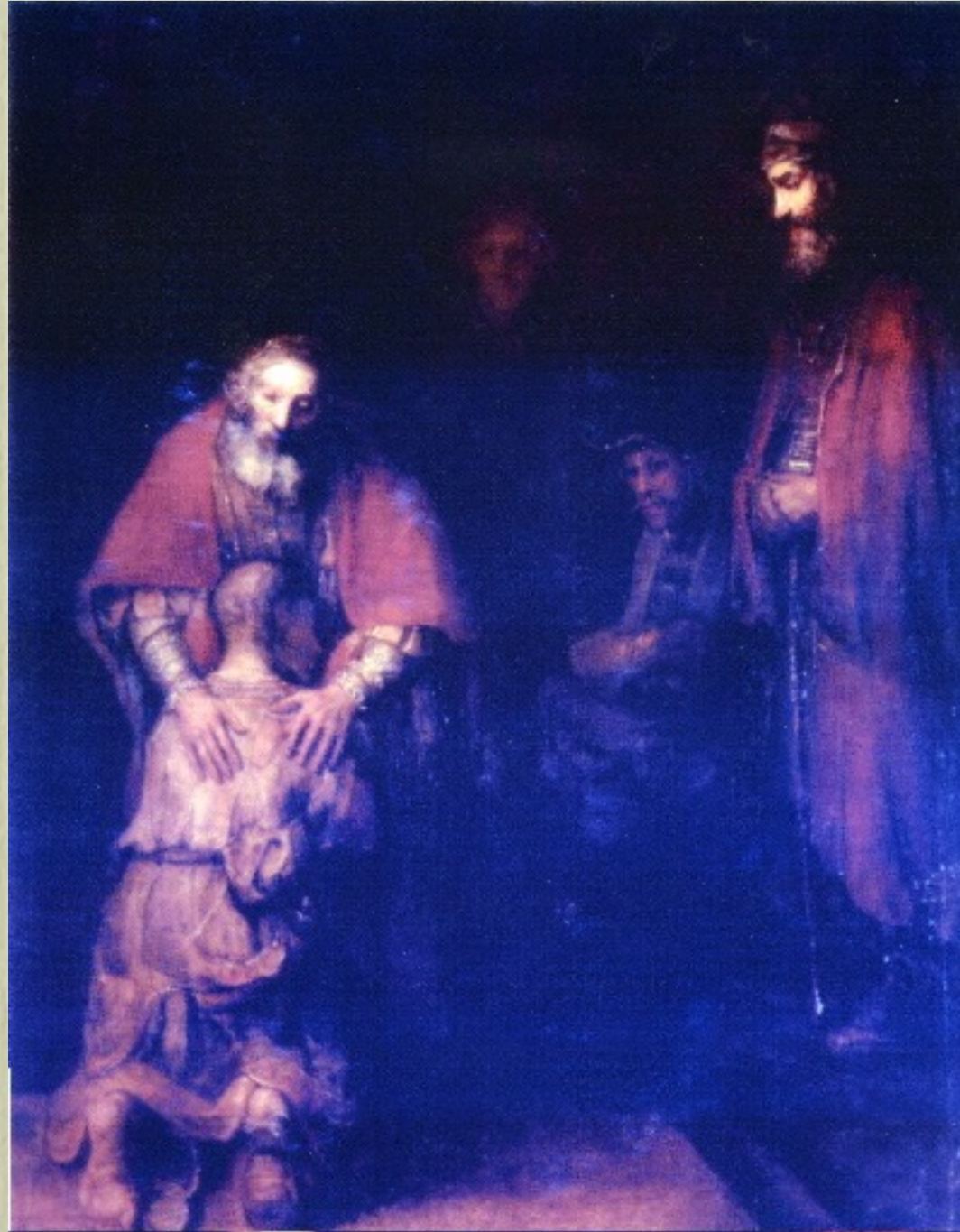
Holy and awesome is GOD's name.

¹⁰Reverence for ['fear of'] GOD is the beginning of wisdom.

Wise are those who live this way.

Praise of GOD will continue forever.

Praying Psalm 112 with Jesus



¹Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

Blessed and happy are those who revere [fear] GOD,
who delight in GOD's law.

²Their descendants too will be blessed.

They will be mighty in the land.

³Their households thrive,
their righteousness endures for ever.

⁴When they find themselves in the dark,
a light is shining for them:
the light of their GOD who is gracious,
tenderly compassionate and just.

⁵All goes well for those who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

⁶They will never falter and will be remembered forever.

⁷They are not afraid of evil tidings.

Their hearts are secure in GOD.

⁸Steady and fearless,

they are not afraid of their enemy.

⁹They give generously to the poor.

Their righteousness endures.

Their strength brings them honour.

They will never falter.

¹⁰The wicked are angry

on seeing the prosperity of the just.

Their hatred eats them up.

Their desires will be thwarted.

¹Blessed and happy are those who revere {fear} GOD,
who delight in GOD's law ... ⁴their GOD who is gracious,
tenderly compassionate and just.

The verb ḥanan means to show favour {ḥen}. The one showing favour is 'gracious'. When used of God it refers to the many particular ways in which God graces his people, or an individual. 'Gracious' is one of the qualities attributed to God in the creedal formula that recurs throughout the Bible.

¹Blessed and happy are those who revere [fear] GOD,
who delight in GOD's law ... ⁴their GOD who is gracious,
tenderly compassionate and just.

The Hebrew for 'womb' is rehem. It is likely that there is a connection with the verb rhm which speaks of the tender compassion that GOD has for his people. The noun raḥamîm speaks of God's tender compassion. Being 'tenderly compassionate' is also one of the qualities attributed to God in the creedal formula that recurs throughout the Bible. We recall also Jesus' words: 'Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate' (Luke 6:36).

⁶They will never falter

As we reflect with Jesus on this verse we recall the final words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: ‘The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock’ (Matthew 7:25).

⁹They give generously to the poor. Their righteousness endures.

‘The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written: **He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.**’ (2 Corinthians 9:6-9).

¹⁰The wicked are angry on seeing the prosperity of the just.
Their hatred eats them up. Their desires will be thwarted.

In reflecting this verse we recall Jesus' parables about the Last Judgment, about what ultimately matters in our lives (Matthew 25). When we have to face up to our obstinate and persistent failure to welcome grace and to live accordingly there will be 'gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 25:30).

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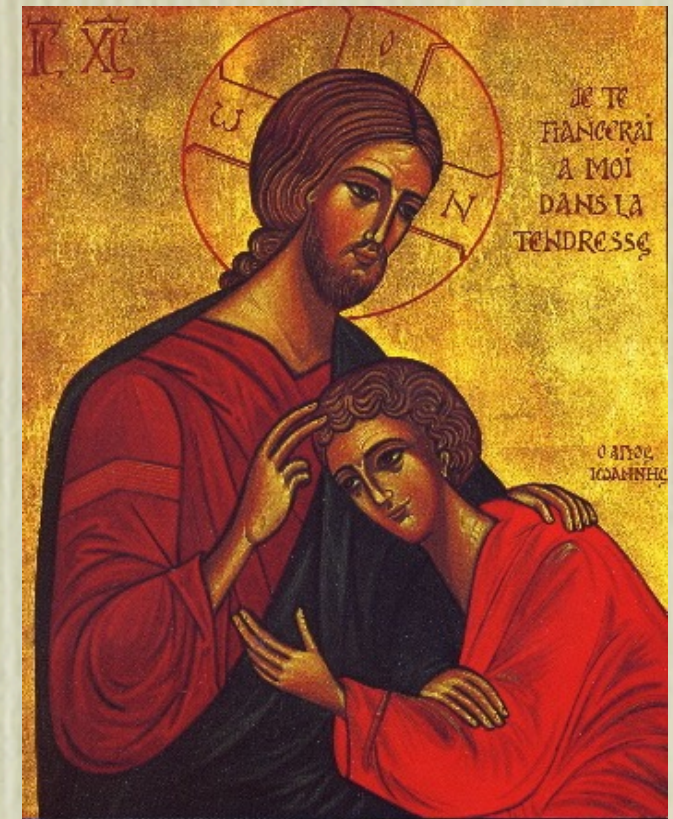
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Their strength brings them honour.

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Praying Psalm 113 with Jesus



This is the first of the so-called Hallel Psalms (Psalms 113-118), sung on the pilgrimage feasts (Tabernacles, Passover, Pentecost), and also at Hanukkah and each month at the new moon. It is an acclamation of praise and joy. All are invited to praise GOD, especially for raising up the poor.

¹Alleluia! ²O servants of GOD, praise GOD, now and forever.

³From the rising of the sun to its setting,
praised be GOD, who is on high, above all nations.

⁴GOD's glory shines over the heavens.

⁵Who is like our GOD, enthroned on high?

⁶GOD looks down upon heaven and earth,
to raise the poor from the dust.

⁷GOD raises the needy from their misery,
⁸to seat them with princes, with the leaders of the people.

⁹It is God who gives a home to the barren woman,
and gladdens her heart with children. Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

Verses 6-9 speak of God's action on the earth. Compare the Canticle of Hannah (1 Samuel 2) and the Magnificat of Mary (Luke 1:53-53). Praying the psalm with Jesus we see God carrying out God's liberating action in and through Jesus.

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to raise the poor from the dust.

⁷GOD raises the needy from their misery,

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and gladdens her heart with children. Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

7GOD raises the needy from their misery

Reflecting on verse 7 we recall the following from James: ‘Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?’ (James 2:5).

**9It is God who gives a home to the barren woman,
and gladdens her heart with children.**

Reflecting on verse nine we recall Paul’s words to the communities in Galatia. He quotes Isaiah 54 verse 1: ‘Shout, you who have not been in labour! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married’ (Galatians 4:27). We might reflect on Jesus’ words on Calvary: ‘Jesus said to the disciple, “Here is your mother”, and from that hour the disciple took her into his own’ (John 19:27).

Psalm 113

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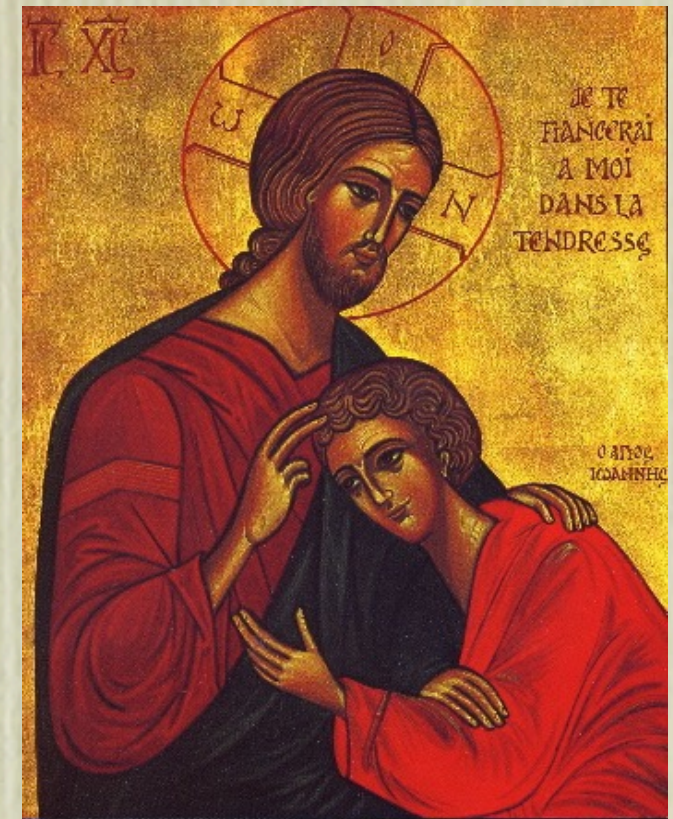
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and gladdens her heart with children. Praise GOD! [Alleluia]



Praying Psalm 114 with Jesus



This is a joyful, festive hymn inviting praise of God for liberating Israel from Egypt and marvellously caring for them as they journeyed. It has a special quality of concentrated, lyrical energy.

¹When Israel came out from Egypt,

the house of Jacob from an alien people,

²Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel, God's dominion.

³The sea pulls back before them, the Jordan retreats.

⁴The mountains leap like rams, the hills like yearling sheep.

⁵'Why shrink back, O sea? Jordan, why do you retreat?

⁶Mountains, why is it that you leap like rams,
you hills, like yearling sheep?'

⁷Tremble, O earth, at the presence of GOD,

at the sight of the God (אֱלֹהֵי) of Jacob,

⁸who turns rock into a pool, flint into a spring of water.

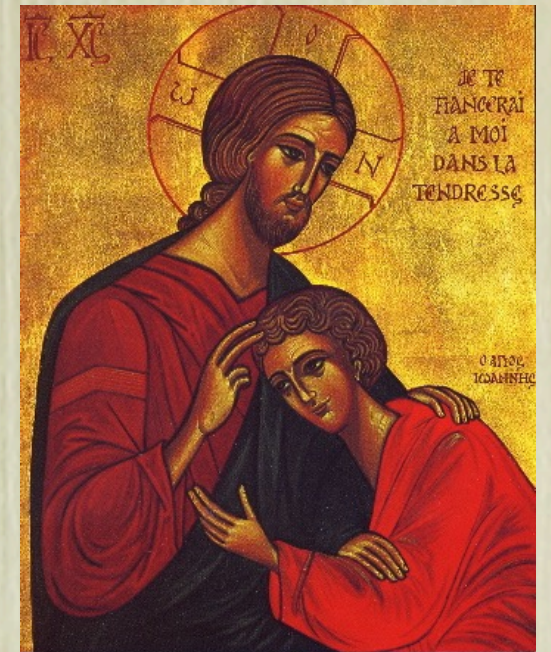
Psalm 114

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at the sight of the God of Jacob,
⁸who turns rock into a pool, flint into a spring of water.

Praying Psalm 115 with Jesus



¹Not to us, O GOD, not to us, but to your name give glory,
because of your covenant love, because of your faithfulness.

²Why do the nations say, ‘Where is their God (אֱלֹהֵיהֶם)?’

³Our God is in the heavens and answers to no one.

Compare the following: ‘My tears have been my food by day and by night, as they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”’ (Psalm 42:3 and 10), and ‘Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?”’ (Psalm 79:10).

Verses 4-8 is a polemic against idols from the period of the Exile in Babylon. Before the Exile there was an attempt to educate the people away from having idols, because of the danger of falling back into an identification of GOD with an idol (see the account of the golden calf, Exodus 32, and the idols in Bethel, 1 Kings 12:29).

⁴Their gods are crafted by hand, mere silver and gold.

⁵They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.

⁶They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.

⁷They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk.

No sound comes forth from their hollow throats.

⁸Those who make them are like them; as are all who trust in them.

During the exile, it appeared that Marduk, the god of Babylon, had defeated Israel's God. Furthermore they could only point to a destroyed sanctuary when asked: 'Where is your god?' Their response was 'Our God is in the heavens and answers no one' (verse 3; see Genesis 1). This psalm belongs with parts of the Isaiah scroll in mocking the popular Babylonian idol-worship (see Isaiah 44:12-20 and 46:1-7).

In verses 9-11 the psalmist appeals to the people of Israel assembled in prayer, then to the priests, and then to all who look to GOD in reverence to place their trust in GOD.

⁹Israel, trust in GOD, your strength and your shield.

¹⁰House of Aaron, trust in GOD, your strength and your shield.

¹¹All who revere ['fear'] GOD, trust in GOD,
your strength and your shield.

- ¹²Always mindful of us, GOD will bless us all:
the house of Israel; the house of Aaron;
¹³all who revere ['fear'] GOD, both small and great.
- ¹⁴May GOD bless you more and more,
you and your children.
- ¹⁵May you be truly blessed
by the Maker of heaven and earth.
- ¹⁶The heavens belong to GOD,
who has entrusted the earth to you.
- ¹⁷The dead go down into silence.
They do not praise GOD.
- ¹⁸But we, the living, bless GOD,
now and for ever. Amen! Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

In verses 14-15 the psalmist prays for GOD's blessing. As we pray this psalm with Jesus we recall his words in the parable about the ultimate judgment, where the king (the Risen and Exalted Jesus) says to those who have cared for people in need: 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father' (Matthew 25:34).

Jesus does not share the psalmist's understanding that **'the dead do not praise GOD'** (verse 17). When the Sadducees tried to make fun of the idea of life after death, Jesus responded: 'You are wrong. You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God' (Mark 12:24). He goes on to remind them of God's appearance to Moses in the burning bush, when God declared: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Exodus 3:6). Jesus adds: 'He is the God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong' (Mark 12:27).

Psalm 115

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because of your covenant love, because of your faithfulness.

²Why do the nations say, 'Where is their God?'

³Our God is in the heavens and answers to no one.

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