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**BUDDHIST APPROACH TO RESOLVE FAMILY PROBLEMS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY OF SRI LANKA****Rev. Dr. Kalapitiye Ariyawansa**

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**Abstract:** The topic of this study is the "family conflict situation in Sri Lanka at present and using a Buddhist approach to resolve them". Today's society has changed significantly compared to the past. This study discusses the conflict of the family institution occurred due to the issues faced by the families in the contemporary society. The main objective of this study is to find out how Buddhist teaching can be used to avoid and prevent such family issues.

The issues faced by the contemporary families are not well identified by the religious organizations. A successful effective model should be formed based on the Buddhist

teachings to address the family issues in the contemporary society.

On this study data was collected on existing family issues especially in relation to married life and analyzed using the qualitative and quantitative methods to find out the real causes of the issues and Buddhist canonical teachings were also used to offer solutions for these issues.

**Key words:** Family conflict, Family institution, Family issues, Contemporary society, Buddhist teaching

## Introduction

Man likes to live in the society, to maintain the life successfully (Dhammapada, stanza 44). His or her emotional wellbeing will lead to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. Then, the entire community would become a source of values. However, today it is not obvious to see such a society. All through, history up to the present, man with his unlimited desires has been causing a deteriorating attitude. As far as the social environment is considered the time has come for us to rebuild the society for the better through an attitudinal change (Saṃyukta Nikāya, sutta 47). Therefore, it is appropriate to study counseling methods with the intention of making a better society. This is not only about the life of the people today. This is about the future of mankind. If not, we will be led to a state of chaos. To accomplish this there should be a change in attitude. Otherwise we all would be responsible in creating a decadent society. Our responsibility is to rescue people from such social and personal decline.

If we can look into the personal attitudes in the dossiers of the people, then we will have an opportunity to find out problems faced by them. Then they can be directed to set up a way to better control the situation and to face the real problems which confront them. People will then emerge through necessary new management techniques as well. It is therefore important to start planning for an ambitious program to fulfill this responsibility.

This is likely to change the families in the Sri Lankan society. It is the cultural characteristics of the society that need to be changed (Rahula, 1956, p. 42). The Buddhist cultural characteristics of society appear to seem real. Sensitive lifestyles are seen in the Sri Lankan society. Members of the society can see all the economic changes in the political environment (Hettiarachchi, 2001, p. 32). With a 2,500 year old history, untiring social patterns of Buddhism have worked well for the Sri Lankan society. By observing and protecting five precepts as a society, we have been able to live together. This paper aims to present a plan to organize a real program based on a counseling process. It is a form of family counseling that offers opportunities to change the entire society. Therefore, through this study it is expected to direct people towards the morale value system.

This study investigates into family problems with a correct understanding. It is impossible to come to any conclusion only by looking at a problem externally. If someone does so, it is incorrect and will lead to anti-mannerism. To be sensitive to a problem is considering a problem with empathy as one's own problem. Looking into others' problem as one's own problem is a very important way of understanding and solving a problem (Dhammapada stanza 97).

At present, the social process is a complex one. Similarly social, economic, cultural and religious influences can be seen in the present day society. Economy is a great contributing factor for a good and pleasant life (Hettiarachchi 2001, p.20). Many think that a good personality is created through it. They tend to consider this as an accepted social method. But in doing so many are subjected to physical and mental pressures. In such a situation, solace can be received from religious doctrines. Religion is a guide that shows the correct path to the common people. According to Buddhism, restraining from committing five- fold sins itself will lead to mental well-being. Although it is true, people don't have sufficient knowledge about it. They only seek refuge of religion when they face trouble in their day to day lives.

There are more responsibilities in a married life, compared to the childhood and youth. This study attempts to make married people aware of the obligations of a married life. In Sri Lanka, there is a husband dominant family co-operation. He is the head of the house hold. Wife and children are always under his protection. In the past, the family was nourished by the father. The household management and administration were in the hand of the wife.

However, the situation has started to change. The main reason for this is that fact that in the present day society, both husband and wife are employed. Therefore, the children are under the shelter of a servant. Usually kids are kept in a daycare centre and the whole family life is in a stressful situation. This results in family problems. This is only one factor contributing to family problems (Dhammananda , 1999, p 56). Other factors include:

- Not receiving support from both spouses in preparing meals
- Disliking listening to each other
- Irregular economic management
- Non-formal social association

All these actions cause family problems. Therefore this research study can be useful to create mutual wellbeing in a family. Author is planning to explain family counseling through this paper. It is expected to investigate the variations in families in Sri Lanka in this study. It will focus on the husband and wife and their responsibilities. This paper will further discuss the prospect of the depth of family counseling. In a family, the main persons are the husband and wife. Both of them are the main characters in a family life. The truth of living harmoniously is the foundation of the basic notion of good society. In addition, through accurate understanding without the destruction of family, they should start their family life. Therefore a proper understanding of life is very important (Anguttara Nikāya, IV, 281).

Many have studied the Buddhist teachings and their application in contemporary family problems that include areas covering internal family problems, economic problems, political problems, science and technological problems as well as religion and social problems (Ananda 1983, p. 62). The researcher has not found any comprehensive research study covering the general society in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, the researcher attempted to study the concepts relating to social behavior and compare Buddhist approaches. The present research is based on social behavior with social conflicts in the contemporary society. Sri Lanka has a long history. Earlier in the model, a social order has been created through the modeling of the existence of the present society.

In this paper utilizes both Qualitative and Quantities research methodology to analyze data. Majority of the people are not happy with their married life. They will continue with their married live without dissolving their marriage institution. Therefore it is important to assess quantitatively that majority of them are one not happy. Qualitative aspect is important to understand this problem deeply. Buddhist canonical teachings are explored to find solutions in this paper.

## **1. Internal Family Problems**

Everyone with a family life may have multitude of problems of life. For this reason, mental confusion also occurs. It may also cause stress conditions. Since there are no correct solutions in the present society, not only emotional but even physical disabilities may occur (Saṃyutta Nikāya VIII.1 2005,). Understanding the problems with the external environment brings more problems to the mind. Therefore from the beginning world does not work to prevent it. In the present study physical and mental problems will be expected to be discussed (Descartes 1983, London).

When something changes, it may make one sad (dukkha). However, when you live in the world, you often have to live with different thoughts. This is a normal thing. Hence hatred, envy, and sorcery can be traced back to life's frequent features of life-hatred, hatred, and adultery. This is what the Lord Buddha has pointed out to be the hood, the hatred and the fainting. Often people are trying to ruin their lives because of their nature. This dimension is very bad for life in the world as well as for the world. He has been made aware of the nature of the monkey and the birth of a dog all of which are profane, because of his greatness, (Magghima Nikāya I, 2001). Things are happening in the hands of the world, their work is done by man, and everything is a cause of greed. The Supreme Buddha taught that all these things will be caused by covetousness (Saṃyutta Nikāya III, sutta 83).

This means that the woman's figure, the voice of the woman, the woman's voice (the female's touch and the feminine taste of the masculine mind are all around, as well as the man's voice, the male's (male-headed) man's touch and the fruity taste of the flesh. Everything is being understood every time as both the husband and the wife are both older people. The relationship between the two is based on belief, the belief that a husband will not be able to make a baby or a baby wandering through it, in this way, the one who lives his life on the notions of love and kindness. Just as man is conscious of it, both husband and wife are physically made. On the other hand, it will never create any conflict in a place where there is love for him.

Wife plays a leading role in the family conflict in today's Sri Lankan society. She has exceeded the limit of her patience on her busy schedule. There is margin for only a very few mistakes to occur, before clashing with the husband. If the wife does not have the husband's support at home, the entire family life will suffer. However, the lord of the family should give a value for her efforts. It is the Lord's responsibility to honor her and give her the glory she deserves, and the community should be appreciative of her. If all the actions occur with equality between husband and wife then no conflict will occur in the family. Especially it will allow the wife to maintain her position as a human being. Then she will become a fairly likable person.

## **2. Economic Problems of the Family**

Economic management has been well described in Buddhism. Does Buddhism have anything special to contribute to our understanding of poverty, and how to alleviate it? Like other religions, Buddhism is sometimes criticized for its idealism: for encouraging a non-materialistic way of life that goes against the grain of our main desires and motivations. If we want to reduce poverty, we are referred instead to the science of economics, which has discovered the laws of economic growth that promote worldly well-being, and to international development agencies, which apply those principles to improve a lot of "undeveloped" societies.

The concept of abstention and moderation in Buddhism greatly helps to solve the problems raised through high consumption. The current consumption pattern has resulted in billions of people to live without food every day. However, a very small number of people are enjoying maximum benefits of the economy. There is a solution within the concept of 'Buddhist Charity' to bring modern consumerism on to the right path.

First of all, what kind of moderation is identified? Much of the material wealth is not being meted out according to the need. There is some advice on moderation mentioned in the Metta sutta (Samyutta Nikāya, I sutta 8, p. 143-152, 2005.). Having only few tasks (appakiccō) and that there is a lighter presence (sallahukavutti) or not hoping for many things. In Buddhist society, having less desires (appicca) is highly regarded. The Buddha also showed the value of not owning more than minimum needs for Buddhist monks and laymen. The main needs for the purpose of maintaining Buddhist monks (bhikkhu) life are the clothing (cīvara), food (Pindapāta), shelter (senāsana) and medicine (Gilānapaccaya). These basic requirements for a monk are met by Buddhist lay people. The basic necessities of the lay society are food, shelter, clothing and medicine too. However, here are also many secondary needs for lay people. Further, the lay people have additional duties and responsibilities in the society (Dīgha Nikāya, sutta 31 III p.180, 2005.). Therefore, in the layman's society, the economy, or money, has become a real driving force.

### **3. Politically Related Problems of the Family**

The political influence is greatly activated throughout the country. Anyhow for the existence of a country politics is needed. It has the ability to direct the country towards to the correct path. Politics has influenced every sector in Sri Lanka. Even state administration has been influenced by politics and sometimes it confuses the local administration system too. Thus the administration is affected causing many hardships to the common people. When fulfilling the basic needs of the common people, they are distributed at will by the politicians. Because of the party politics, people often are disunited with too many political parties. Most people do not have sufficient political knowledge. The politicians take shortsighted decisions in administration. The reason for this is that most of the politicians are not properly educated. Because of this reason politicians are accustomed to act without principle. This will create the problems among the people (Sanyutta Nikāya, 2005). That also has an influence upon the family problems.

In politics, how a king rules his country is an important factor. The king rules righteously when the inhabitants of the country are righteous. Country's people have a problem if there isn't a righteous rule. Then social issues may appear everywhere. It is expected to describe the political standards of the country according to the teachings of Buddha (Dhammapada stanza 25, 2005.).

Craving has become a factor in changing lives. This is the situation in the ordinary world, but it is the responsibility of everyone to understand and act accordingly. At the outset, the author has also stated that a lot of work has to be done in order to be successful in working together in marriage. Here, covetousness is the most important, and its actions are connected to it. However, covetousness leads the secular life, and the discourse of the Buddha says that ((Dhammapada stanza 25, 2005.) When one is free of covetousness; no fear of suffering it is obvious that liberation (nirvana) wants to eliminate greed, and the various complacent life-forms of the society." It is time

for an entire society to suffer. The Buddha pointed out that this situation is a normal affliction. However, it is similar to that of the general public (Dissanayaka, p. 42). But if you are able to control your heart, you will have a better life. It will be a good life. Controlling suffering is controlling the craving, since daily suffering is caused by cravings. This is one of the most important teachings for those who marry. A balanced program is needed to make a success of their family life. It is also important to maintain one another's duties as economically strong. Accordingly, the Lord Buddha has made sure that the person can survive misery (Saṃyutta Nikāya III 4, 2005).

#### **4. Science and Technological Problems Related to the Family**

Science plays a key role in developing the countries. Day to day lifestyle of the common people was changed by this. Because of the science the technology also develops. Hence it is easier to carry out human needs. In the past if it took long time to do a thing, now it takes only a little time to do the same due to scientific discoveries. On other hand this contributes to human development too. Thus every section of the world has been developed (Donald, Chicago Press, 2008.).

With advancement of Science, many machines and tools are used by the people. Hand phones, computers, televisions and vehicles are some of them. All of these are created with the hope of reducing the spending time. However, people use them to idle away their time, spending money. All the members of the family separately use each instrument. As a result the co-operation and unity within a family is degenerating. This issue too will be dealt with in this study.

Lord Buddha has shown the importance of moderation. Furthermore, when used only for a good purpose, it can be considered as a good factor, and one will obtain mental redress through it. Anyway the technology has given us many things. If we use them carefully with discernment the world would be very beautiful. Always try to think twice.

It is especially important to realize the fact that most of Sri Lankan people use science and technology in their day-to-day activities. So our focus should be on this. Especially because of their daily responsibilities and obligations, the parents are getting distanced from the children. It is also likely that clashes within the family will occur because of these reasons. Televisions and smart phones have become the most important equipment for everyone.

According to the discourse of the Buddha, this can be seen as an attempt to please the five sensory organs. Though they work hard for this purpose they only get vexation. Hence, the "indriyabhāvanā sutta" (Magghima Nikāya sutta152, III p. 298, 2005) describes cultivating a lack of attraction to one's organs to cause emotional relief. Thus, you may think that making such a decision is justified in the marriage. By acting according to this it will not only beredress for him but also for the entire family. Therefore, 'indriyabhavanā sutta' mentions how to control five faculties of the man. Complex mind can't do that. Because, if one can calm down the mind, family problems well not arise in his mind.

#### **5. Social Problem related to the Family**

For the existence of human beings, the influence of the religion on the society is important. By understanding the religion observed, one can mold his good character. But in today's world the good existence is sought by people without acting in a proper way. People are working as if they do not have a proper understanding of their own religion.

People who act within the principles of the religion are living successful lives. They want to live a very simple life. Some people use the religion only for their personal purposes. Some make the religion their whole life. People who understand the environment are those who observe their religions (Rahula, 1978, p. 02). They are the ones who maintain the good qualities since their childhood. Most people of the present society have changed their lifestyles according to their education. Today there is a competitive education system in Sri Lanka and this is also a key factor in changing the life of a person. Because of the education, people have been separated from their religion. Not only that but also the co-existence among the people has decreased.

Due to the egoism, the veneration of the parents and adults has deteriorated. So the co-operation among the people is decreasing day by day. But day by day the myths have been increasing. These will be discussed. Buddhism is the main religion in Sri Lanka. In addition, there are Hindu, Islam and Christian religions as well. Attitudes of the majority of the people who accept Buddhism should be non-violent, while the relative acceptance of the other religions must be nonviolent. But sadly that was not observed in the society. What is the utility of any religion in Sri Lanka? There is a common Psychological, ethical, and Sociological need for the emergence of different religions in this world, namely, the need to safeguard the corollary of human society. If applied to the text, religion's utility is to protect social order. However, it is regrettable that today the religion has gone beyond its objectives. Today, religion is practiced simply to divide gender, caste and humanity. This is indeed a wrong thing. It really should take place, as much as possible, as it is possible to ascend ideally. The "four Satipaṭṭhāna" mentioned in Buddhism, is a psychic exercise according to the Vipassanā (Dīgha Nikāya I 22, 2005.) meditation for the mind. It will become a great issue in order to enable human society to work on the individual's vision.

The vision of the person who meditates the deep meditation is broad. It is an external thing from religious, ethnic, tribal and sexual conceptual situation. In the past there was wonderful social relationship among the people. Among the majority of this country there was a wonderful cooperation. Social courtesy effectively existed in the society. The main occupation was farming. The main capital necessity viz human resource could get through cooperating without being paid. Therefore, there was a collective attitude and cooperative assistance among them. The human resource was meted out through free labor system, but with the development of science and technology with the people's necessity of human labor was limited. Everything was handed over to the machines. When they needed the human labor, there were good human relationships. But when machines came, human relationship was decried. Today, the main social unit, the family, is also in a state of collapsing.

The reality we can see in Buddhism is the description of the real condition. For this purpose, Buddhism has used a method of comprehension and self-understandable method, viz. the knowledge that is present in one birth is transmitted to another birth. The supreme nature of the reality could be achieved. Science is also trying to understand the paramount state of the reality. But here science adopts a comparative and conceptual access, viz. by building up a concept and directing it into many experiments and inspecting its validity. The Buddha explained the reality through spiritual method and science does it' through physical access. Through science, something is concluded by doing and experiment and by observing the results and making a conclusion. The basic fact is to confirm the previous result. In theistic religions there isn't such a thing. There, one should

accept something without any kind of questioning. In Buddhism, there is a teaching about good faith. Buddhism took a separate path than science and theistic religions. In Buddhism it gives priority to get realization through spiritual understanding beyond the experimental limit. The experimental methods in Buddhism are more scientific than the experimental methods in science. About the Buddhist experimental system there is a description (Aṅguttara Nikāya, III 65-66, 2005.) that paved the way to the democracy and to personal freedom. That was not given by any other religion in the world. Through its preaching, any person who belongs to any class, in any social condition could understand the correct path through scientific methods. This sutta has been preached to the villagers of Kālāma. Those villagers had a problem of identifying the correct vision as many religious leaders coming to their village had told them that all the other religions are false and only their religion was the correct one. Therefore the Kālāma people presented this question to the Lord Buddha. For the first time in the world, a method of finding a scientific solution was preached there. Those facts are as follows.

- 1) By the thing has heard before. (*mānussavēna*) Wish folk talk's history
- 2) According to the tradition. (*māparaṃparāya*)
- 3) According to the saying. (*māitikirāya*)
- 4) Because it is mentioned in a book. (*māpiṭakasampadānēna*)
- 5) It being matched with the argument. (*mātakkahētu*)
- 6) As it matched with the theory. (*mānayahētu*)
- 7) As being exposed to the criticism. (*māākāraparavitakkēna*)
- 8) As suitable to his vision. (*mādiṭṭhinijjanakkantiya*)
- 10) As one's cleverness. (*mābabarūpataya*)
- 11) As the parents and teacher were saying so (*māsamanhogaruhi*) To enter into any conclusions based upon above facts is not suitable (Aṅguttara Nikaya, III 65-66, 2005.).

Accordingly, when a problem arises in the mind, the way to understand its truth and falsehood is described here. In many occasions when the conflicts occurred in the married life we can see the external influences. In Sri Lankan society, people look into other people's conflicts than their own conflicts. As they have no other business in their house they look into others' affairs. However there are some facts especially mentioned in Kālāma sutta.

*"What do you think, Kalāmas? Does greed appear in a man for his benefit or harm?"*  
 — *"For his harm, venerable sir." — " Kalāmas, being given to greed, and being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by greed, this man takes life, steals, commits adultery, and tells lies; he prompts another too, to do likewise. Will that be long for his harm and ill?" — "Yes, venerable sir."*

*"What do you think, Kalāmas? Does hate appear in a man for his benefit or harm?"*  
 — *"For his harm, venerable sir." — " Kalāmas, being given to hate, and being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by hate, this man takes life, steals, commits adultery, and tells lies; he prompts another too, to do likewise. Will that be long for his harm and ill?" — "Yes, venerable sir."*

*"What do you think, Kalāmas? Does delusion appear in a man for his benefit or harm?"*  
 — *"For his harm, venerable sir." — " Kalāmas, being given to delusion, and*



*being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by delusion, this man takes life, steals, commits adultery, and tells lies; he prompts another too, to do likewise. Will that be long for his harm and ill?" — "Yes, venerable sir." (Aṅguttara Nikaya, III 65-66, 2005.)*

Lord Buddha explained that because of greed, hate and delusion, many actions are being changed. But as long as this true situation is not understood, man will not be able to change the nature of his mind. This is especially noteworthy. It is very valuable to act correctly with a good mental redress in keeping up the married life well. It is possible to point out this situation as a habit of coexisting religious affiliation with profligacy, hatred and misbehavior.

Religion and society are all together. Religion provides a good vision and is maintained within society. So, Kālāma Sutta (Aṅguttara Nikaya, III 65-66, 2005.) explains how to get an accurate knowledge of religion. It's better to deal with the marriage in this way. By understanding it, they will be able to live a good life when their husband and wife are in their daily routine.

In this research a way to resolve existing family problems is explored. For this purpose, we can identify many of the pāli canonical suttas that are related to human family problems. In this regard following suttas are identified as very relevant and applicable. These are; Sabbasava sutta, Sigala sutta, Agganna sutta, Cakkawattisihanada sutta and Metta sutta (MagghimaNikaya, I 6, 2005.). Main teaching belongs to this research is found in Sabbāsava sutta. Buddhist teaching was focused to avoid conflict among the married people. With this finding we can reach a final conclusion to build more happy and understanding married life among human beings. Contemporary Sri Lankan society is having many problems due to change of the value system among the people. Due to recent developments in many aspects change of purpose and meaning of married life were changed. Therefore it is best time to study and provide Buddhist solution based on canonical teaching.

## **Conclusion**

The facts understood after studying the problems in depth are mentioned here. During the study it was noted that everyone we met acted without understanding the life properly. Most of them did not live under the correct guidance of their parents. In addition to this, the majority of them have not associated with religious places. Accordingly they did not have a chance to mold a good life journey. Thus they spent their lives with an experience outside the society and all the examples were taken accordingly.

Here a few things that are important to people's lives are referred to introduce the nature of life. Given the above facts, many conflicts were due to misunderstandings. They need to identify themselves with their own common nature. Therefore, we need to do our utmost responsibility in this regard.

Anyhow giving a mental redress by these suggestions is offered as a pre example. However, there is a pervasive format for the development of psychosomatic relief in this package. The Lord Buddha has given many discourses relating to a good marriage. In the meantime, let's look at how to apply the Sabbāsava sutta to make the married life a success. Lord Buddha preached seven issues in this sutta. These are:

1. *attibhikkhaveāsavādassanāpahātabba.* (There are defilements to get rid of by vision).
2. *attibhikkhaveāsavāsaṃvarāpahātabba.* (There are defilements to get rid of by continence).
3. *attibhikkhaveāsavāpaṭisevānāpahātabba.* (There are defilements to get rid of by retrospection).
4. *attibhikkhaveāsavāadhivāsanāpahātabba.* (There are defilements to get rid of by patience)
5. *attibhikkhaveāsavāparivajjanāpahātabba.* (There are defilements that should be excluded by avoidance.).
6. *attibhikkhaveāsavāvinōdanāpahātabba.* (There are defilements that should get rid of by entertainment.).
7. *attibhikkhaveāsavābhāvanāpahātabba.* (There are defilements to get rid of by meditation).

According to the fact in this sutta, it is mentioned that one can attain nibbāna by giving up cankers. This method itself can be utilized to finish the married life problems and to get redresses. Buddha's discourses always cause social development, and accordingly hereby a method is submitted for problem solving. The conflicts in a marriage can be given up by the view. View means to see. For this, eye, out of the five sensory organs is used. So an occasion is created to study the nature of the conflicts externally. All these are binding with the objectives. Therefore when evil thoughts come into being, if one is aware of it, the conflicts could be avoided.

Likewise, the continence is a must in life. It paves the way to succeed in something on many occasions. Married life is also a very important occasion. When both get together, similar views and ideas can occur. Then good conduct will prevail, causing success.

Furthermore, the winning in life with understanding should be everyone's objective. This was always preached by Lord Buddha. The comprehensive trust is also considered as a good faith. Accordingly the understanding is the special factor in building up the trust. In that point of view, the married life should be spent with an understanding.

Likewise, patience is a very valuable human virtue. This was completed by Lord Buddha as perfection. When conducting one's activities if one acts patiently he can pave the way to a successful life. Accordingly when conflicts are arisen in married life by asking patiently those conflicts can be solved. This sutta discussed seven factors. Those are defilements to get rid by visitor, continence, retrospection, and patient, excluded by avoidance, entertainment and meditation. These are basic roots for arising conflict of the mind. Without a correct understanding about this, people make troubles. This is an important condition in the married life by understanding it and should be gotten rid of.

Married life can be shown as spending life happily. If one always has a nice looking nature it means he has a happy mind. Thus maintaining it is every one's responsibility. Married life is a responsible life. Continuing it is an obligation of both the husband and the wife. Therefore if acting happily in wedded life there may be no any conflict. When we think about it all the facts mentioned here are derived from the mind. So it is clear that for every action the mind plays a key role. There are some virtues that should be cultivated by meditation. Meditation is a process that leads to control and develop the mind. Therefore the controlling of mind itself can be called as the root of the settlement. Accordingly if the married people control their minds no conflict may arise in their married life.

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