

# The Teacher and Religious Education Begins at Home

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children”  
(Deuteronomy 4:9, ESV).

## Objectives

1. Illustrate how the Hebrews regarded the home as the fundamental education institution and/or the real center of education.
2. Outline how the *Shema* was/is observed in every aspect of Hebrew/Jewish life.
3. Relate how the ancient Hebrews had a holistic way of life.
4. Propose the scriptural connection between knowing and doing or hearing and obeying.
5. Examine how visual aids were an essential part of Hebrew/Jewish life.
6. Identify and briefly explain the five states of the learning cycle as proposed by Wasukundi.
7. Described four types of students classified by the Talmud.
8. Assess how visual and audio learners learn best.
9. Report and expound on how God used the five senses in teaching in Leviticus.
10. Provide examples of how Jewish feasts/festivals effectively served as visual aids in learning and served as a paradigm for experiential Jewish education.

## Introduction

Christian education is many ways an extension of Hebrew education. This lesson looks at various principles of Hebrew education, primarily those that originate, or should originate, in the home. Christian education in its truest form is about transmitting faith from one generation to the next, from the cradle to the grave.

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## *Education Begins at Home*

Historically and traditionally, among the Hebrews, the real center of education was the home. In short, Jewish education is homework! Ancient Israel had a limited system of formal education for children. Hence, the home was the center of education and the major source of learning. The parents played the key role in instructing children. Life itself became the child's school and the family the primary education institution. Swift (1919) concurs, "Throughout the entire history of the Hebrews the family was regarded as the fundamental educational institution" (50).

## *Education is from the Cradle to the Grave*

Religious education does not isolate one age group or season of life, but should be from the cradle to the grave. The emphasis in this lesson is on childhood education. The author's cultural setting involves global missions, specifically in the area of Bible college education. Bible school faculty can be instrumental in promoting, preparing and proclaiming Christian education in local church settings. Additionally the principles derived in this lesson extend to the Bible school classroom and are applicable there as well. Education should begin at the earliest age possible. But it is considered life-long:

The early Hebrews stressed the idea of education as a continual process to be carried on literally from the cradle to the grave functioning at all times and in all places. For the Hebrews, education was definitely a lifelong affair and did not cease with graduation. Every Hebrew, be he rich or poor, young or old, was obligated to study the Torah every day. (Schoeman, 1997, 422).

A Jewish father would take his baby and dip his finger in honey and place it in the baby's mouth. This reinforced that God's Word is sweet. It became second nature—like the air one breathes. It's always there. However, these words were strange in the midst of cultures that worshipped hundreds of gods.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6: 4-9, ESV).

This section of God's Word, called the *Shema*, speaks directly to the family. It was to be observed in every aspect of life, taught diligently to children, and reinforced with constant reminders. God's Word was to be continually in the midst of the family. The *Shema* or "Hear, O Israel" was used in both morning and evening prayers. It echoed the monotheistic message that God is One. As soon as a child began to speak, he was taught to repeat the words of the *Shema*. The verses (or at least the first several words) were the last words used before dying and in times of danger.

Gordon Dryden and Dr. Jeannette Vos (1999) in their book *The Learning Revolution* explained, “Fifty percent of a child’s ability to learn is developed in the first four years of life. This makes parents the world’s most important educators” (31).

The NIV translates verse 7 as “Impress them on your children.” Small children are like wet cement. It is easier to make a lasting impression. Older children become like dried cement. It is more difficult to make an impression. The mold has been cast.

The Jesuits used a maxim, “Give me a child until he’s five and I will have him the rest of his life.” They have a vision for their children: Make them Catholic! How is this possible? They begin at infancy. They are deliberate and consistent.

### *Education Encompasses all Areas of Life*

Jewish education was theological, religious, and spiritual. But it was also practical, encompassing all areas of one’s life. “Spiritual formation is one of the recognized benchmarks of higher education that is Christian” (Maddox, 2010, 423). Jesus had been with his disciples in the school of life. Education is not about passing information or impressing students with the instructor’s intelligence. It is about substantial changes and transformation in lives. It should be holistic, including intellectual, social, moral, physical and spiritual growth.

Hebrews had a holistic view of life. No wonder Deuteronomy 6:5 looks at every individual holistically. Students should be treated wholly, not just as intellectuals but also as spiritual, emotional, and physical beings. This is evident in the life of Jesus Christ, “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40, ESV). “There is no distinction between the secular and the religious area of life” (Regalado, 2001, 98). Many of the cultures the author has experienced as a global missionary would agree. Religious thought and spiritual understanding permeate every area of life. There is little difference or demarcation between the spiritual and the secular, between the church and the marketplace. The purpose of the celebration of different Hebrew festivals is primarily spiritual and centers on God. To the Jews seasons were created for man and outlined the kindness of God toward them.

### *Education Connects Knowing and Doing*

To “teach diligently” according to Deuteronomy 6:6 means to teach incisively and intentionally in order to impress God’s Word deeply upon the lives of children. Roy B. Zuck states,

Parents are commanded by the Lord to be intense, diligent, earnest, and consistent in teaching their children God’s Word, so that it is applied to their children’s hearts and inculcated into their lives. Parents, as teachers of the things of God, dare not be haphazard, negligent, or halfhearted in the training of their children (Zuck, 1964, 234).

Scripturally, there is a connection between knowing and doing, hearing and obeying. There was integration between learning and doing, theory and practice. The Hebrew seat of intelligence is in the ears. “Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!” (Psalms 78:1,

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ESV). Effective education contained “both theory and practice, knowledge and actions, for the Law had first to be *studied*, and then to be *done*” (Barclay, 2001, 39). Education works best when the content is something the student can immediately use or implement.

The Jews were pragmatists. They were never interested in making education a game of storing up abstract concepts or theoretical principles. Education had to be useful in meeting the challenges and needs of this world. To know something was to experience it rather than merely to intellectualize it. In short to ‘know’ was to ‘do’ and learning was life (Wilson, 1989, 131).

### *Education is Audio and Visual*

Angelo Amato provides a tremendous word picture of a teacher. He states a teacher is like a candle. It consumes itself to generate light for others to see (Wasukundi, 2012, 283). How true. Teachers should consume themselves so their students can clearly see. The instructor becomes the example for students to follow. They bring lessons to life through encapsulating them in their daily lives.

The Jews were often called “people of the book.” Early schools were sometimes called *Bet ha-sefer*, that is “House of the Book.” However, the nation did not start out that way. “It begins with a bookless people who erect heaps of stones to record events” (Barclay, 2001, 20). Thus instruction consisted primarily of oral teachings (passed from one generation to the next), repetition, and example through daily living. Methods of instruction were oral and the good example of the teacher was central. All subject content that had to be committed to memory was repeated aloud about four times until the pupil learned it.

Two basic facts must always be borne in mind about Jewish teaching. First, it was based entirely on oral teaching, and therefore it was conducted entirely by repetition. The word *Mishnah* itself means *repetition* and *instruction*, for they were one and the same thing (Barclay, 2001, 39).

Every religious festival was a visual for training. The festivals are detailed in Leviticus 23. “Parents were directed to instruct their children in advance or during the celebration in the origin and meaning of the festival. In many of these festivals the children were given a distinctive role to play” (Schoeman, 1997, 420). The festivals allowed for both priests and parents to teach and review the origin and meaning of the occasion. “No other activity in Hebrew life did more to educate and develop the national and religious consciousness of the Hebrew than these annual festivals. This was true for individuals, for the family and for the nation as a whole” (Schoeman, 1997, 420).

Visual aids were an essential part of Jewish life and part of perpetual education. Jewish customs and feasts (like the Passover) were designed to remind families of God’s goodness, deliverance, and kingship. Life on the way to the Promised Land revolved around the Tabernacle (the tent of God’s presence). All the tribal tents were arranged in order around the Tabernacle. The father was designated as the teacher in the home.

The *Tefillin*, or *phylacteries*, are a set of two small black leather boxes worn by Jewish males above fifteen years of age on the left arm facing the heart and on the forehead containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses (Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21), in accordance with

scriptural directives (Exodus 13:6, 9; Deuteronomy 6:8, 9; 11:18). These are visible signs or symbols encouraging; (a) recollection that God brought them out of bondage in Egypt; (b) fostering spiritual development; (c) remembrance of God’s constant presence; and (d) binding of the heart, head, and hands to keep thoughts and actions in alignment with God’s desires and commands.

Wasukundi (2012) advocated a learning cycle that incorporates such approaches as described above: “The 5 E’s represent five stages of a sequence for teaching and learning: Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend (or Elaborate) and Evaluate. Going deeper in Jesus’ teaching, it is clear that most of His lessons portrayed in the gospel follow the 5 Es model...” (270). An outline of this model follows:

TABLE 1  
 FIVE STAGES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Engage	Engagement is designed to captivate the student’s interest and to get them actively involved in the lesson.
Explore	Get student involved in the topic, either alone or in teams, experiencing the topic with the instructor acting as a facilitator.
Explain	Students communicate what they have learned and explains what lesson material mean(s).
Extend	Students explore the implications of the new knowledge (perhaps assessing how it can be applied to one’s life.)
Evaluate	Students and instructors can evaluate and determine how much learning and understanding has taken place (Bybee, 1989).

***The Tabernacle and Jewish Feasts as Visual Teaching Tools***

“And Joshua said to them, ‘Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever” (Joshua 4:5-7, ESV).

The Jewish people effectively learned about God through visual aids. The stones mentioned above became a visual forever concerning the Lord’s goodness to His people. The Jewish feasts and fasts were visible tokens and teachings concerning the relationship between God and man. “As children asked questions about the meaning of the ceremonies, the parent’s answers were to be informative and instructive” (Lawson 2013, 26). Their philosophy was that you remember what you see. In this manner they passed truth and tradition from one generation to the next. “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have

seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:9, ESV).

We live in the midst of the twenty-first century media-aware and sensitized visual learners. Many learn best through visual means. They easily pick up information with their eyes. They associate the things they learn with the things they see. Visual learners prefer and utilize pictures, examples, infographics, colors, maps, drawings, scribbling, doodling, and other visual media to augment learning. They learn best by watching. Students tend to remember or recall content better if taught visually and orally.

Oral learners, akin to visual learners, make up a large percentage of the developing world. They learn best by non-literate means. They associate the things they learn with the things they hear. They transmit their beliefs, values, culture, through stories, drama, songs, and proverbs or sayings. These are also incorporated into Jewish feasts.

Early preachers and teachers repeated what they saw and/or heard incorporating principles and precepts derived into their lives: "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20, ESV). "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9, ESV). "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you" (1 John 1:3, ESV).

Repetition is powerful. It drives the teaching point home and is important in the learning process. When a student hears, sees, and does things repeatedly it helps acquire and assimilate knowledge or a given skill. Alain de Bottom makes this observation "Religions are cultures of repetition. They circle the great truths again and again and again" (2013). Repetition burns the truth or teaching into memory. The Apostle Paul understood the educational and spiritual value of repetition: "Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith" (Philippians 3:1, NLT).

### *Focus on the Tabernacle*

The Tabernacle is a compelling, convincing, convicting, creative visual aid for exploring the salvation plan and Jesus' saving work on the cross of Calvary. We can teach visually using the Tabernacle model. The intricate plans of a primitive movable 15th century B. C. tent is applicable and useful to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian and church. The Tabernacle helps us visualize and understand the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It pictures what is required of man to become right in their relationship with God. Sinful man must come to God in a prescribed way. "They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain'" (Hebrews 8:5, ESV). Going through the Tabernacle looking at the furniture it should be realized every visual had a principle or purpose behind it. It was to tell God's story of redemption. The physical structure was a picture of heavenly things.

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4, ESV).

### *Focus on Feasts and Fasts in Leviticus*

Traditionally, Leviticus was the first book Jewish children studied in the synagogue. Today, it is apt to be one of the last books of the Bible anyone takes earnestly. Reading through the Pentateuch, sometimes weighted down with wading through a book like Leviticus, it is possible to miss how God uses the five senses, seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, and hearing to foster learning and create a lasting impact on the hearts and minds of His people. For example, all or most of these senses are contained in the passage concerning the ram of ordination found in Leviticus 8:22-31. Leviticus is more than a book of regulations. It is about relationships with God and others. Leviticus 23 provides a scriptural overview of the seven annual feasts and fasts appointed by God. “The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, these are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts’” (Leviticus 23:1-2, ESV). Such feasts were “a shadow of the things to come” (Colossians 2:17, ESV) fulfilled by Jesus Christ and foresaw that all nations would celebrate these before the Lord (Zechariah 14:16).

***The Shabbat:*** This comes from a Hebrew word meaning “rest” or to “cease from work” and is commonly referred to in English as the Sabbath (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 16:23-30, 20:10-11, 23:12, 31:13-21; Leviticus 26:2; Deuteronomy 5:15 and so forth). “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:8-10, ESV). The Sabbath is a weekly day of rest designed to commemorate or remember God resting after the days of creation and later the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. In this celebration time with family and friends are enjoyed; negative, unpleasant talk is put aside; great joy is manifested; public transport is suspended; and a time of spiritual enrichment is anticipated. Participants are freed from their weekly concerns as a festive meal is prepared and enjoyed.

Shabbat begins a little before sunset on Friday evening, meal enjoyed, prayers prayed with services held on Saturday morning, and the festivity ending at nightfall. Some see it as a day filled with all sorts of restrictions but it is a day of freedom where Jews strengthen their memory through visual means along with employing aspects of the other senses.

***The Passover:*** Passover, lasting eight days, is one of the most important Jewish festivals and is a reminder of the trust Israelites put in their God. The festival involves the family. The most severe of the plagues God released on Egypt was the death of each firstborn son. To be separate from this destruction the Israelites put the blood of a lamb on their doors. God killed the firstborn sons in the homes of all unmarked doors. In remembrance of this great event Israelites sacrifice an unblemished lamb shortly before Passover to be eaten the week. Because

Israelites left Egypt so hastily their bread could not rise properly, risen bread is cleared from the house. The family joins in the search for any bread and burns it. The event is educational as it involves the sight, smells and taste of the Passover. Songs are sung. Questions are asked. The story is retold. Combined there is a progression beyond an intellectual exercise to the story coming alive.

Daniel Rose claims the Passover and the meal served on the first night of the festival provide a paradigm for experiential Jewish education:

“It is widely agreed that experience is central to the enterprise of informal education. John Dewey expressed this idea by suggesting that people are active centers of impulse rather than passive vessels, learning best when they are actively engaged in experiencing an idea or an event rather than passive observers to it...This results in an educational philosophy that places importance on the experiencing of values personally with events to be experienced at first hand, rather than their being described to the learner. This has become synonymous with the term ‘experiential education’” (Rose, 1).

The concepts of feasts, fasts, festivals, and so forth work well with this type of education because they are grounded on experiences.

Children played a central role in the *Seder* meal. The father is to say, “You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’” (Exodus 13:8, ESV). “From this the Talmud teaches us that each and every one of us must see ourselves this night as if we were personally redeemed by God from Egypt. This forms the educational philosophy for the night’s proceedings” (Rose, 3). The re-enactment or re-experiencing of the story, through relating it to the family especially children, was to be done on the “very night when it originally took place, in order to aid the experiential dimension of the commandment. This active memory is most unique to Judaism and the way historical events are remembered in Judaism’s festivals” (Rose, 5). Questions were asked and encouraged. “The Rabbinic tradition understands study to be essential to community and knows that there are many kinds of questions and questioners. So, the *Seder* is, in effect, an educational model” (2011, 4). The *Seder* is a core ritual of the Jewish tradition.

**Yom Kippur:** This is commonly referred to as the “Day of Atonement” which is a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase. It is a Sabbath of Sabbaths, the holiest day of the year, set aside to atone for the sins of the past year (Leviticus 16:29; 23:27-32). Its central themes are repentance, return to God, and atonement. Virtually all Jewish holidays involve meals and festivities. What happens on the Day of Atonement (although there is a large meal the day before) is not a festive event. It involves fasting twenty-five hours from the evening before to after nightfall on the specific day. It was customary to wear white to symbolize purity and forgiveness calling to mind “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson” (Isaiah 1:18, ESV). The day is spent in fasting, resting,

attending services and intensified prayer. Biblically, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of the bull which was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat seven times. Lots were cast concerning two goats to determine which would be slaughtered and which would be driven away. The second goat, the scapegoat, symbolically bore the sins of the nation, was kept alive, driven away to a desolate place, never to return. This foreshadowed a greater, more permanent cleansing of both God's people and God's dwelling place.

So much of Jewish tradition and teaching is passed on through visual means. This includes the feasts, fasts, setup on the Tabernacle and Temple, along with narratives, stories, parables, and so forth. Today, educators endlessly strive for methods to enable and encourage students to remember the content they teach and to unveil the principles helpful in daily living. The Jews have had the educational edge on this for a long time. They understand that people learn best by experiencing. Remembered events tend to be highly emotional so they connect events with emotions both with the soul and the spirit.

Repetition is still a key to learning. As events and teachers are repeated it brings about review. Without review information is lost from memory. The Jews keep memories fresh on an ongoing basis. They cause adherents to picture or visualize not only in their minds but through enacting and embracing the things that should be remembered. They repeat this until it is learned or even overlearned. Through the different feasts and so forth they are able to relate the ideas and information to remember to other events and concepts they know enabling them to retrieve meaningful concepts from memory.

**Shavout:** The Feast of Weeks, a harvest feast, is seven full weeks or fifty days after the Feast of First fruits. It was required of all Jewish males to travel to attend the feast and offer sacrifices. Interestingly, it is the only feast that utilizes leavened bread. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, on the Day of Pentecost, the promised Holy Spirit came (John 14:16-17). A harvest of souls began that continues today as people are being saved.

## Conclusion

Through the participation in various feasts and fasts the Jews stepped back to remember so they could move forward; securing their future through remembering their past. Storytelling, visual aids and repeating history with explanatory narratives solidifies learning. They bring people into the experience. Jewish feasts maximize this in an engaging pictorial way. The celebration of the feasts brought history to life. What an awe-inspiring way to teach and should be incorporated into the teaching profession. "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11, ESV).

We preserve the nation through preserving its religion (Swift, 2001. 76). Thus, it is imperative for education to begin at home with the parents as primary educators. Through incorporating the principles in this paper, it is possible for students to become like those described as follows:

Four types of students are classified by the Talmud: a sponge that absorbs everything, a funnel that takes all in at one end and lets it out at the other end, a sieve that lets wine pass through but keeps the lees, a winnow that removes the coarse meal but keeps the fine. (Cohen 1961, 179 as quoted by S. Schoeman).

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### Lesson in Review

1. Historically among the Hebrews where was the real center of education? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Among the Hebrews what was/is regarded as the fundamental education institution? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Christian education is a continual process from the cradle to the grave. Explain. \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Show how the *Shema* was observed in every aspect of life. \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Christian education is more than passing information from the instructor's intelligence. What, then, is it? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Explain how the Hebrews had a holistic view of life. \_\_\_\_\_

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7. What does to "teach diligently" (Deuteronomy 6:6) mean? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Effective biblical education scripturally makes a connection between knowing and doing. Explain. Verify. Prove. \_\_\_\_\_

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9. How is a teacher like a candle? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Israel began as a “bookless nation.” How did instruction take place? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Show how visual aids were an essential part of Jewish life. \_\_\_\_\_

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12. What are the five stages of the learning cycle advocated by Wasukundi? \_\_\_\_\_

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13. What did the visual signs (Tefillin and phylacteries) represent? \_\_\_\_\_

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14. What are four types of students classified in the Talmud? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. How do visual learners prefer to learn? \_\_\_\_\_

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16. How do audio learners learn best? \_\_\_\_\_

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17. How is repetition powerful or effective in the teaching/learning process? \_\_\_\_\_

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18. How is the Tabernacle an effective visual aid? \_\_\_\_\_

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