



# Four Simple Lines: Contemporary Advice for Practicing *Parting from the Four Attachments*

His Holiness the 43<sup>rd</sup> Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche



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**Four Simple Lines:**  
**Contemporary Advice for Practicing**  
*Parting from the Four Attachments*

His Holiness the 43<sup>rd</sup> Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche

# Acknowledgement

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By the merit of this work, may Their Holiness the Sakya Trichen, the 42nd, and the 43rd Sakya Trizins enjoy perfect health and very long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.



Buddha imparted innumerable amounts of teachings. *Parting from the Four Attachments* contains all the teachings. It is the essence of the Dharma and serves as our GPS on the path to enlightenment.

Is buddhahood even possible? Once we have grasped the essence, we grasp it all.

In this text, His Holiness explains the profundity of *Parting from the Four Attachments* in a simple and comprehensive manner so that all of us—monastics and lay people, whether we are having a busy or relaxing lifestyle—are able to put it into practice in our daily lives. Only by implementing the Dharma in our lives, are we truly embarking on the journey toward buddhahood.

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## Introduction

**P***arting from the Four Attachments* is one of the most common teachings for mind training. It is a Sakya teaching that is practiced by all the traditions of Tibet. The teaching originated with Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, one of the five Sakya founders. When he was young, his teacher, Bari Lotsawa, told him to do a Mañjuśrī retreat to gain wisdom and master the teachings. After six months in retreat, Mañjuśrī appeared to Sachen Kunga Nyingpo in a vision, and he gave him this teaching. It has four lines:

*If you have attachment to this life, you are not a practitioner.*

*If you have attachment to saṃsāra, you have no renunciation thought.*

*If you have attachment to oneself, you have no bodhicitta.*

*If you have grasping, you do not have the proper view.*



When he heard these short lines, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo realized that they contain the entirety of the Buddha's teachings. It is important to understand that the point of hearing the Dharma is not that we should focus on extensive teachings. The point is to gain a view of the nature of reality. The Buddha is talking about reality, the ultimate truth. He gave his teachings like pointing to an apple and saying, "This is an apple." Understood this way, the Dharma is simple and to the point. I believe this is how we should see it.

This teaching, given to Sachen Kunga Nyingpo by Mañjuśrī himself in a pure vision in the twelfth century, was passed on to Sonam Tsemo, who is another of the five founders of the Sakya tradition. Sonam Tsemo gave it to Dragpa Gyaltsen, and he gave it to Sakya Pandita. From there, it passed down through the Sakya lineage to the forty-first Gongma Trichen and the forty-second Sakya Trizin, right up to the present. So, we possess the pure and unbroken lineage of this teaching.

## **Getting Started**

Before beginning the *Parting from the Four Attachments*, I like to do a short meditation. We normally have so many things going

on in our minds, so many thoughts, that it is good to first make our minds clear, calm, and ready to listen to the teachings. It's a lot like cleaning your hands before you eat. How you do this can vary depending on the experience you have with meditation. You can meditate on compassion, thinking that we are receiving this teaching for the sake of all sentient beings. Or, you can do a simple breathing meditation, keeping your thought on your breath as you inhale and exhale. Or, you can set a statue in front of you and use it to keep your mind in one place, which is called śamatha.

## **Method and Motivation**

We should understand what we mean when we talk about doing a practice. We say, "I'm doing my sādhanā," or "I'm going to do a tsog," or "I'm going to do a ritual," or "I'm going to do a retreat." All of these practices are *methods*. They are methods for us to become enlightened, to understand emptiness, to understand reality. These phrases mean the same thing. When we say we will do this or that practice or a retreat, we are saying that we will employ one of the methods which comprise the sole

path for reaching our goal of becoming enlightened. This is important to keep in mind.

In Buddhism, our motivation is also extremely important. In fact, without having the right motivation, we will not be doing a Dharma practice at all, but something else. The intention determines the result. Your motivation should be to become enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings. We believe in life after death, in reincarnation—that all of us have been born and reborn many times in this cycle of saṃsāra. We are all in the same condition. Thinking about this, we want to become enlightened because we want everyone to become enlightened. We want to end suffering, and there is no higher method for doing that than reaching enlightenment. When enlightenment is reached, all suffering, the whole of saṃsāra, will be gone. It is the ultimate state from which there is no falling back, ultimate happiness. This is the goal of every Buddhist.

## The First Line

*If you have attachment to this life, you are not a practitioner.*

**T**his line means that if you do the things you do, anything at all, for your benefit during this lifetime, then you are not a practitioner. Practitioner means someone practicing for enlightenment. Imagine you were going on a journey or crossing a river. To get to your destination, you need a method of travel, such as a boat to cross the river. Of course, you do not become attached to the boat or wish to stay on the boat. This is how you should think of this life, as part of the journey to enlightenment, and then you can use the opportunity without getting attached. Every practice that you do in this life, everything at all that you do, should at least be for the next life, or the next, all the way to your ultimate goal, which is to be enlightened. That is a very important point here.

We should look at it this way: to be born in a human form is very difficult, according to the teachings. You might be thinking that there are billions of people in this world, so must be

easy to be born as a human. But you should think again. It is not difficult to create an idea of how many people are in the world, or in this village, or in this room. But it is actually very difficult—almost impossible—for us to conceive the number of sentient beings that exist even in one room. There are too many to count.

To be born as a human is very difficult because you need to have the right karma. It takes great karma to be born as a human. Then, even if you are born in a human form, it is difficult to find the right path. There are many areas of the world that have no Dharma practice at all. You could be born in a place with no teachers, or in a war zone with much suffering, or in a place with famine or social disturbances. On top of that, to be born as a human with an intact body and mind is also important if you are to practice Dharma. Looking at all these different aspects, you will find that it is true that it is difficult to be born as a human in the right circumstances for practice.

Let's say that you are born as a human, and you do have the chance to practice Dharma. You have heard the Dharma, you are fine both physically and mentally, you have time, and you have family. All is good. Even then, everything in saṃsāra is impermanent, and this includes the life that you have now. We do not know how long we will live, or how much time we have

for practice. We typically say, “Oh I am young. I have time. I will grow old.” But this is imagination. In reality, we don’t even know whether or not we will live until tomorrow. Impermanence is a second factor that we must remember, along with the difficulty of obtaining a human birth. Remembering impermanence is a powerful way to be rid of your attachments. These thoughts are an important part of today’s teaching. They will give you encouragement to practice.

As Buddhists, we do not believe in a creator. We are all born in this cycle of saṃsāra because of our own karma. No one else made us come here. If we do good things, then we will experience good results. And likewise, if we do bad or sinful things, then we will experience bad results, and we will take rebirth in difficult circumstances. This is quite simple to understand.

Someone might ask, “If this life is very precious, why are we always talking about the next life?” The reason is that with this life we have a chance to practice Dharma. That is why this life is precious, this human life. We should look at it this way. Or, someone might ask, “Why do we do long life practices if we are not supposed to be attached to this life? Why should we do wealth deity practices like Gaṇeśa or Jambhala or receive Medicine Buddha teachings?” You should think carefully so that

you will understand for yourself and for your own motivation that all these practices are not for this life. They are for increasing your opportunity to practice Dharma in this life. If you have a long life, for example, then you can do more Dharma practice and acquire more merit.

Merit is very important because without merit, there is no enlightenment—always remember that this is our goal. To reach it, we need merit and wisdom. These are the two ingredients—the two elements—that will produce the goal. If you are alone in the world, how can you practice compassion? How can you practice bodhicitta, the wish to be enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings? The long life practices and wealth deity practices provide us with opportunities to gain more merit. With wealth, you can help other sentient beings, and this means you will be gaining more merit. If you practice Medicine Buddha, you will gain a healthy life, and you can use it to help other sentient beings. These practices exist so that you can gain merit. This is also important to understand.

Finally, if you are only thinking about this life, then you are increasing attachment to this life. If you are attached to it—locked down to this life—then it will be very difficult for you to become free from suffering. Attachment is the main thing

that is keeping you in saṃsāra and keeping you from achieving ultimate happiness, or enlightenment.

This is how the first line is explained. One last thing to say is that this line is expanding our horizons, broadening our view beyond this lifetime. We are usually only thinking about today, next year, or sometime later in this life. But if we follow the teaching, we will expand our horizon to include much more.



## The Second Line

*If you have attachment to saṃsāra, you have no renunciation thought.*

**A**s a practitioner of the Dharma, it's important to understand that in saṃsāra there are six realms: three upper realms and three lower ones. I do not need to say much here about the three lower realms—the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, and the animal realm. Anyone can see that there is great suffering in these realms. In particular, the hell and hungry ghost realms are extremely difficult places where there is a lot of suffering. The animal realm includes animals living in the ocean and on the ground. There is much suffering in this realm, too. Animals constantly eat one another, or they are used by humans for labor or for food...all kinds of sufferings. Animals do not have any say in this or any rights. Some people might think that animal owners are nice people and gentle to their pets, and the animals seem happy. But how can we identify whether the animals are truly happy or not? We do not speak an

animal language. We might think they are happy, but we cannot really know.

The three upper realms are gods, demigods, and humans. We commonly imagine that gods live in beautiful palaces, wear beautiful clothes, and look beautiful, and nothing at all is bad there. But because of all this luxury, they do not think about Dharma practice in the god realm. They never think about becoming enlightened. It is like us when we are very healthy. We will not worry much about how far away a hospital is, or if we can reach a doctor, or if we will be able to take our medicine on time. We will not worry about eating junk food, or drinking alcohol, or smoking. But when you become sick, when you are in bad health, then these things become important. You will want to know how to find a doctor, and you will consult with him and follow his advice—whatever he says. On the first day, you will probably take it with great care on schedule—in the morning, after lunch, after dinner. But later, when you are not so sick anymore, you will find yourself thinking, “Oh, I forgot to take it this morning. But it’s okay,” or, “Just a little bit of junk food or alcohol won’t hurt.”

The god realm is similar to this because there is so much luxury that it is difficult to follow the teachings. Understand that this

luxury and so-called happiness of the god realm is a good thing only if you understand it in worldly terms. They have enjoyments all the time. But as Buddhists, we say that we do not want to be reborn in the god realm.

Next are the demigods. Because of their karma, everything they have is lesser when compared to the gods. They want to be like the gods, and for this reason, they are angry and envious. Because of their anger and their ignorance, they make war on the gods, but they are always losing. When their warriors die, they experience great pain and suffering. For the ones who cannot go to battle, they can see their loved ones dying. Demigods have strong power of sight, and they can see the battle as it is happening, like looking at a television or into a mirror. When they see their loved ones killed and undergoing such terrible pain and trouble, they also experience terrible mental suffering. Because the demigods are consumed with war, this is a place where you do not want to be reborn if you are a practitioner.

Finally, we come to the human realm. The human form, as I said in the beginning, is very precious and good. It is true that there are many human beings who are not physically or mentally intact, or who were born into an area with famines or other places with physical suffering. Nevertheless, when you are

in the human realm, there is also the opportunity to practice Dharma, and this is the most important thing, the benefit of having a human form. We can look at the whole of saṃsāra, and we can see that those who are born in the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, the animal realm, the god realm, the demigod realm—they all have suffering and distractions that make Dharma practice impossible or very difficult. The suffering in the human realm is real, too, but there is also the opportunity to practice.

You might think, “Oh, this human form is not bad because we have good things that happen to us, many things to enjoy—parties, and all kinds of similar things.” But if you look carefully, even the things that we call happiness in this human form are not really happiness. Whenever you think that something is nice, there is also the knowledge that it will not last. It will end. The things we consider to be happiness do not bring lasting, real happiness. They are only changes in the scenery.

Looking at each of the six realms of saṃsāra as we have done, you can see that everything is suffering. This is why the text says, “If you have attachment to saṃsāra, you have no renunciation thought.” You need to renounce all samsaric things—the whole of saṃsāra. Trying to attain enlightenment or to become a buddha means trying to get out of saṃsāra.

Depending on your karma, you will be born in the god realm, the hell realm, or one of the others, and there is no beginning and there is no end to this. Because it goes on endlessly, like a circle, we call it the cakra, or wheel, of saṃsāra, and what we are doing is trying to get out of this circle. To do that, we must have the renunciation thought, a strong thought to renounce saṃsāra. You definitely won't feel any attachment to the hell realm, but you might to the god realm or the human form. And any attachment that you have is keeping you in saṃsāra. If you were born as a god and this were a permanent state, things would be different. But because of karma, even gods will die and be reborn somewhere else. In your next life, if you have the karma for it, you might be reborn in a hell realm. If you are reborn in the human realm, you might be reborn in extreme poverty, or as someone with other great suffering. The point is that saṃsāra has no place in it that is worthy of attachment. This is the way that you should practice.

## The Third Line

*If you have attachment to oneself, you have no bodhicitta.*

**T**his means that if you do anything, any practice, having your own benefit in mind, then you do not have bodhicitta. As a Mahāyāna Buddhist, whenever you are doing a Dharma practice, it is for the sake of all sentient beings—so that they can be enlightened. This is bodhicitta, the thought to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. In order to have bodhicitta, we must have compassion. The very basis of Buddhism is compassion; without it, there is no Buddhism. Bodhicitta and individual acts of compassion are not the same thing, and you must be able to differentiate between them. Things like feeding the hungry, or giving someone clothes, or being generous and kind—these are not of themselves bodhicitta. They are very compassionate things to do, but bodhicitta has a much greater scope and view. With bodhicitta, you are thinking, “I wish every sentient being to be free from suffering, to be enlightened.” Individual compassion is much more limited, thinking, “I want *this* person

to be free from suffering.” Bodhicitta means that you want every sentient being to be free from suffering—not only this person, not only all human beings, not only the gods, but every sentient being in the whole of saṃsāra across the six realms.

In order to become enlightened, you must have compassion that wants everyone to become free from suffering. Where does such compassion come from? It comes from loving-kindness. Loving-kindness just means wanting the other person to be happy. You have to understand where this is coming from. We know that we have been reborn in saṃsāra many times, countless times. We have been born and died in many different forms and in different realms. And because of this, every sentient being in the whole of saṃsāra has been our mother at one point in time. For this reason, everyone in saṃsāra should be held very close to us with loving-kindness, like a mother. Normally, we use the example of a mother, but it could be any other loved one.

The first step is to think that every sentient being, in one lifetime or another, has been your mother, and all of them have experienced such great suffering. The second step is to think about the kindness and the love that they have shown us. They have protected us and done many things for us. We have to accept that, to understand that, to acknowledge that. Next, we have to think that we want to repay their kindness and love, and the only true way to do this is by guiding them

to enlightenment. With this loving-kindness, we create compassion that is extended to all sentient beings, wishing them to be free from suffering. When we have this compassion, bodhicitta or the thought to attain enlightenment for them arises.

Anything you do with just yourself in mind is not bodhicitta. As I said in the beginning, this is a process of expanding your view, the scope of your view, beyond yourself, beyond this lifetime, and beyond the entire wheel of saṃsāra. When you have all sentient beings in saṃsāra in mind, and your wish is to attain enlightenment to bring them the highest happiness, then your compassion becomes bodhicitta. This is a much bigger view than we normally have. If you only think about your family, your life, this life, this place, you have a very narrow view. To have bodhicitta, you need to be very brave, and you need to maintain this open-minded, broad view.

By broadening your view this way to every sentient being in saṃsāra, your practices will gain much more merit. The more sentient beings that you include in your prayers, the more merit you will gain. Likewise, the more you dedicate your merit, distributing it to the benefit of beings, the more the merit will increase. Merit is not something that is lost by distributing it, until you do not have any left. With merit, the more you dedicate it, the more you gain.



## The Fourth Line

*If you have grasping, you do not have the view.*

**F**undamentally, the Buddha's teachings are talking about the view: about emptiness and the nature of reality. Buddhism is not fundamentally about how you eat, drink, or what you do, but about how you think and see the world. To put it very simply, emptiness means that what you see and how things really are, are two different worlds. We get them mixed up all the time. What you see now is relative truth, and what you need to understand is ultimate truth.

In relative truth, this water glass exists. But you have to investigate by analysis, asking, how does this glass exist? How is it, when it has constituent parts? Is the top, middle, or bottom part the "glass?" If you go deep into it, then you will be unable to find the so-called glass. We have only the name *glass*. It arises from a combination of many things. And its name is something we can change; we can call it anything. In ultimate truth, this

glass does not exist; in relative truth, it exists because it is there, and you can see it. It is very important to be able to differentiate the truths. Many students get confused regarding the analysis, but the simple explanation is that what you see outside is relative truth, and what you understand inside is ultimate truth. To practice this, we train to recognize our perceptions as imagination, our mind's projection, like a projector or a tv. Maybe I see someone on the screen, but they are not really there on the screen, and it would be a mistake to think that they exist there on the screen.

First, you have to understand that whatever you see is your mind's projection. With a projector, you can see things on the wall, an organization of light that creates images, but the things are not really there. Once you establish that, you can go further. You should think that even the mind itself is illusion or imagination. So first, everything you see is the projection of your mind. Then, when you ask, "Where is the mind?" you realize that mind, too, is just an illusion. Going step-by-step this way, you will find that nothing really exists on the ultimate level. There is an illusion, and the illusion itself is just an illusion. It is important to understand, however, that when we talk about emptiness, we are not saying that since things do not really exist, nothing matters. We still live at the level of relative

truth. We are still subject to suffering, and we are still subject to karma. We must practice the path before we can realize the ultimate truth, which is the same as buddhahood.

### **Tying It All Together**

Now we come to the bottom line. All the attachments that we talked about earlier come from self-attachment or ego. To get rid of these attachments from the root means to get rid of ego. As I said, mind itself is an illusion. Think about the scientific explanation for how the eye works. The front of your eye sends signals to the back of your eye, and these signals travel to your brain. Your brain receives the signals and processes them. Even in this scientific explanation, your mind is not seeing the object directly. Rather, what you see is in your mind. Your mind is showing you the things you see, and your mind is illusion. This is the ultimate reality. The benefit of practicing to realize this—ultimate reality—is that you are getting rid of your attachments at the root. That is the goal.

When we speak about enlightenment or becoming a buddha, our goal is not to be near the Buddha, or to be born in the

Buddha's place. Our goal is to become a buddha for ourselves. Becoming enlightened or a buddha does not mean being born on another planet, or going to another place. Enlightenment, buddhahood, is a state of mind. It is the state of mind that understands reality. If you become a buddha today, it does not mean that you will not die tomorrow, or that you will never do anything again—nothing of that sort. Becoming a buddha means coming to understand and to accept reality.

## **We Underestimate Ourselves**

I feel that many of our students—and I include myself in this—we understand that we are in saṃsāra because of our ignorance, desire, and anger, the three poisons. We have heard it many times; we have heard many teachings. So what is stopping us from becoming enlightened, from rushing to the goal? I believe it is because we underestimate ourselves. Many students do not have self-confidence, they underestimate their minds. Students think, “Oh, well I am a normal person. I'm not a Rinpoche. I am just a lay practitioner.” These are all excuses. It does not matter whether you are a Rinpoche or a lay practitioner, which country you come from, or which language

you speak. All of these are only outer or cosmetic things. What matters is your understanding. Enlightenment is the way of understanding reality. It is knowledge. Buddhism is all about knowledge, or wisdom, which when combined in your practice with compassion, becomes enlightenment. To do it, we must believe in ourselves, like we must believe in the teachings. The Buddha said that only you yourself keep you from becoming a buddha. Nobody is stopping you. Nobody can make you stay in saṃsāra. It is all in your own hands.

You might say, “Oh, I cannot do all this. I have a job,” or whatever. It does not matter that you are busy. It does not matter whether you live in a city or in a village. There are many, many sentient beings who have already become enlightened and who are becoming enlightened now. We must take encouragement from that. We know that in this eon that we are in, there will be a thousand buddhas, and the fourth buddha was Śākyamuni. This does not mean that only a thousand buddhas will ever arise. One thousand buddhas are coming in this eon, but there are really hundreds of thousands and many more than this who will become buddhas.

Enlightenment means awakening, just like awakened from dreams, or like a light in a dark room. In a dark room, you can't see anything, and you have to guess where things are. In the

dark, you will have a lot of fear. Similarly, in our present state, we are afraid of dying. We are afraid of the coronavirus. But why? Because we lack knowledge. People are afraid of dying because they do not know what is going to happen when they die; the fear is due to ignorance. If you get rid of the ignorance, then the fear goes away. Take the example of watching a movie that makes you afraid or one that makes you laugh. When you watch it for the first time, the scary parts or the funny parts affect you very much, and you feel all kinds of emotions according to the movie. But if you watch it again and again, then you will not feel very much excitement because you know what is going to happen. Just like this, when you have understood ultimate truth, then there is no fear.

Another example: If there are four doors in front of you, and you must choose one door and go through it, but you do not know what is behind the doors, then you will be afraid of choosing the wrong one. You will be guessing. Even after you go through one of the doors, you might think, "Maybe there was this-or-that behind the other doors." But if you are able to see behind all the doors first, before choosing one and entering, then there will be no worries in your mind.

This is why understanding is so important in Buddhism. Becoming enlightened is all about this knowledge and wisdom.

We are not doing *sāghanās*, retreats, *tsog* or lamp offerings, all of these things, for their own sake. We are doing them as methods to get out of *saṃsāra*, to fulfill our ultimate goal of buddhahood and realize ultimate truth. With emptiness as the view, the Buddha is not trying to tell us that this or that doesn't exist, or that nothing exists. He is telling us what reality is, how we can live, and how we can understand.

## **Knowledge and Belief**

Now, understanding and believing are two different things. We can all understand, more or less, the content of Buddha's teachings—maybe not one hundred percent, but sort of. To really believe them one hundred percent, however, is something different. Strong belief will give you a much higher level of motivation.

Attending the same *tsog* offering, the same *pūjā*, the same retreat, the same initiation—different students in these settings will get different merits depending on their motivation and mind. The merit that you gain depends on the faith that you have, the understanding that you have, and also how much

belief you have in your guru. If you believe one hundred percent, then the merit that you will gain is vastly more than otherwise.

In the same way, we have to believe in ourselves. It does not matter if you work in a busy city, if you have children or a family to look after. You should not think that you do not have enough time. It is all a matter of understanding and believing. Knowledge is the key to ending suffering and becoming enlightened. If you believe in yourself, if you understand the Buddha's teachings, and if you do the practices, then whatever practice you are doing will bring you a lot of merit and even deeper understanding.

You might think, "Oh, but the Buddha's teachings are so long and so difficult..." But look, this teaching only has four lines. These four simple lines contain all the Buddha's teachings. If you want to go into great detail trying to understand this and that aspect, okay. You could even study *Parting from the Four Attachments* for your entire life, and you may or may not understand it, not even a small thing. But if you really want to do this, to put yourself behind this effort of becoming enlightened, then here you are—just four lines, and they contain the entirety of Buddha's philosophy and teachings.



## Concluding Thought

**W**hat I have shared today is my own understanding of *Parting from the Four Attachments*. I am only sharing my thoughts and my beliefs with you, but I am not teaching you—at least, I do not believe that I am. As the Buddha said, nobody else can make you enlightened. It is something that you have to do yourself. From my side, I can share my view, my thoughts. And if you think they are any good, if you think that you can acquire some understanding, if you think that my thoughts are helpful, then, of course, I am very happy. The things I have said here are very similar to Je Rinpoche’s *The Three Jewels* on the topics of renunciation thought, loving-kindness, and the pure view. This is what I am trying to share with you. This is what I believe.





- His Holiness the 43<sup>rd</sup> Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, is the second son of His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41<sup>st</sup> Sakya Trizin). He belongs to the noble Khön family, whose successive generations have provided an unbroken lineage of outstanding Buddhist masters.

At an early age, Rinpoche undertook his training in the principal rituals and prayers of the Sakya lineage. Rinpoche has received from His Holiness the Sakya Trichen most of the major initiations, empowerments, oral transmissions, blessings, and pith instructions that are inherent to the Sakya lineage. Furthermore, Rinpoche has received numerous common and uncommon teachings from some of the pre-eminent teachers of Tibetan Buddhism of our age.



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