

The role of Da'wah in the introduction and spread of Islam in Hausaland (Northern Nigeria)

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Abstract: *This research is on the role of Da'wah in the introduction and spread of Islam in Hausaland (Northern Nigeria). The work of Da'wah has been carried out since in the 14th century C.E. to contemporary time in Hausaland. This research has highlighted that Da'wah work started as result of the activities of the visiting Muslim traders and scholars who introduced Islam to the people. Hausaland also witnessed the influx of Muslim traders and itinerant scholars who came from Mali to spread Islam. The work of spreading Islam was also made easier by the continuous arrival, at different intervals, of Muslim missionaries (Du'at) and traders who continue to guide the people. The research also acknowledged the role of Da'wah of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduwe and his students towards educating the people on Islamic ideology and its practice, this has aided the reformation of the people and its impact is felt in reducing syncretism in Northern Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Role, Da'wah, Spread, Islam, Northern Nigeria.*

I. Introduction

Da'wah is defined as communicating and informing the right path, guiding and showing the way to religion (of Islam) and its counsel in accordance with the statement of Allah:

Invite (people) to the path of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner. Your Lord knows best who strays from His path and who are rightly guided.¹

This Verse emphasizes disseminating Islamic Knowledge to all in accordance with wisdom and beautiful speech. *Da'wah* is therefore the activity of informing one another the way of Allah, and accordingly, *Da'wah* comprises teaching and educating and all forms of communication as well.² According to Munir, the meaning of *Da'wah* could be identified in two ways: first (teaching the) religion or Islam, its basic elements, facts and values and its legislation. Islam is in, reality, a complete social system which comprises all facets of human activity and all law regulating this activity including those that involved the rights of the Lord over his servants: The second identification involves spreading, conveying and inducing or communicating and notifying the religion (ie, inviting the non Muslims).³

Da'wah is one of the noble actions of all Muslims each according to his ability. In a *Hadith* reported by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri who said, I heard the Messenger of Allah as saying:

He who amongst you sees something abominable should modify it with the help of his hand. If he has no strength enough to do it, then he should do it with his tongue. And if he has no strength enough to do it, (even) then he should (abhor it) from his heart and that is the least of faith.⁴

In another *Hadith*, *Da'wah* by enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is an injunction and failure to implement it will lead to Allah's punishment: Hudhayfah bin Al-Yaman said that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

By Him in Whose hands is my life (Allah the Almighty), necessarily you should enjoin virtue and check evil, or else Allah will certainly send chastisement upon you. And then you will pray but your supplications will not be accepted.⁵

Also it was narrated by 'Abdullah bin 'Amr: the Prophet said,

Convey (my teachings) to the people even if it were a single sentence, and tell others the stories of *Bani Israel* (which have been taught to you), for it is not sinful to do so. And who ever tells a lie on me intentionally, will surely take his place in (Hell) Fire.⁶

Da'wah and propagating the message of Islam to non-Muslims and also teaching and providing continuous guidance to the believers constitute the core task of scholars who were the heirs of Prophets.⁷ Preaching the truth and converting the unbelievers to Islam is one of the sacred duties of the Muslims also.⁸ That is why Allah (the most High) has laid down the principles for the guidance of mankind in the Qur'an so that mankind can take precaution against all un-Islamic trends in all their manifestations. The Prophet (peace be upon him) is not only the seal of Prophets⁹ but also a universal Messenger to all mankind.¹⁰ Allah (the most

High) have inspired His Prophet with the truth and sent to him the Qur'an in order to invite mankind to Islam and lead those who believe from the depths of darkness into light.¹¹ Islam is, therefore, a true universal religion and a light to all mankind as such its *Da'wah* should cater for all humanity, both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Since Islam is the religion for the whole mankind, it is therefore imperative to invite and call the whole of mankind to follow its teachings. In Hausa land (Northern Nigeria) the work of *Da'wah* has been carried out since in the 14th century C.E. to contemporary time. It started as result of the activities of the visiting Muslim traders and scholars who introduce Islam to the people. Hausaland also witnessed the influx of Muslim traders and itinerant scholars who came from Mali.¹² The work of spreading Islam was also made easier by the continual arrival, at different intervals, of Muslim missionaries and traders who continue to guide the people. At the beginning, a major problem identified however was that majority of the people then, did not accept Islam and were still animists, and many common people also mixed Islam with un-Islamic practices;

They continued to participate in some idolatrous rites of animism like making sacrifices and libation to various objects of worship. They may have failed to observe the rituals of Islam through ignorance or neglect. In social and economic matters they followed their own indigenous customs and practices.¹³

This situation continued until the emergence of Shaykh Uthman bn foduwe who carried out *Da'wah* and reform movement (*jihad*) in Hausa land (Northern Nigeria) and directly attacked the widespread of innovations and customs that contradicted the teachings of Islam. Anti Islamic trends promoted among the Muslims were eliminated as a result of his *Da'wah*. According to Hiskett:

Hausaland (Northern Nigeria) before the *Jihād* was reduced to mere syncretism and superstition. *Bori*-spirit worship, divination and sacrifices to objects like trees and mountains had become common practices among Muslims who only professed the religion in theory, but upheld paganism in practice. The aim of the *Jihād* was to purify Islam based on the teachings and practices of the Holy Prophet and his companions¹⁴

Introduction and spread of Islam in Hausaland.

In writing about Islam in Hausaland (Northern Nigeria), it is pertinent to analyze the history of the religion and its widespread and contacts and consequent relationship between Hausaland and areas where Islam originated.

Islam is an Arabic word which denotes submission, surrender, and obedience. As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to Allah—that is why it is called Islam. The other literal meaning of the word "Islam" is "peace." This signifies that one can achieve real peace only through submission and obedience to Allah. Such a life of obedience brings peace of the heart and establishes real peace in the society at large. The word "Islam" is from the verb *silm* and (pronounced softly = *silm*), thus *istalama* means "to surrender, to submit, to yield, to give one's self up. Thus *aslama amrahu ila Allah*, means "he committed his cause to God" or "he resigned himself to the will of God." *Aslama* alone would mean "he became a Muslim." The other major shade of meaning in the root is "to become reconciled with one another" or "to make peace." *Salm* means "peace." So is *silm*, "the religion of Islam." The religion of peace and tranquillity.¹⁵

In technical sense, Islam means submission to the will of Allah and obedience to his laws.¹⁶ It was the last religion and an all-inclusive one which contains within itself all the divine religions which went before it. The Qur'an enjoins the believers to say:

Say: we believe in Allah and in that which has been revealed to us and in that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus and in that which was given to Prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him we submit. (in obedience; meaning, obedient and submissiveness)¹⁷

This means that, Islam is to submit, to surrender oneself, or act of resignation absolutely to the will and commandments of Allah (SWT), in complete obedience to the teachings and laws He commanded.¹⁸

In the Hadith reported by Abdullah Ibn 'Umar from his father 'Umar bin al-Khattāb the prophet (peace be upon him) clearly explained the meaning of Islam as comprising belief in Allah the Exalted and worshipping Him alone. He state;

My father, Umar ibn al-Khattāb, told me: One day we were sitting in the company of Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) when there appeared before us a man dressed in pure white clothes, his hair extraordinarily black. There were no signs of travel on him. None amongst us recognized him. At last he sat with the Apostle (peace be upon him) He knelt before him placed his palms on his thighs and said: Muḥammad, inform me about al-Islam. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: Al-Islam implies that you testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and you establish prayer, pay

Zakāt, observe the fast of Ramadan, and perform pilgrimage to the (House of Allah) if you are solvent enough (to bear the expense of) the journey...¹⁹

The name Islam is Universal in meaning and does not come after a tribe of people or an individual, as Judaism is named after the tribe of Judah, Christianity after Christ and Buddhism after Budha. This name does not either originates from the name of a Prophet as the Orientalists, Christian and other secular literature used to call Islam Mohammadanism.²⁰

Islam is Allah's (S.W.T) religion, which He revealed to all Prophets. All of them were expounding the same basics, which declare the oneness of Allah (S.W.T), glorifying Him, worshipping Him, following His commandments, keeping high morals, and improving human behaviour. The differences that we see in religions today are because of suppression of the truth and the alteration of Allah's (S.W.T) previous messages. Allah (S.W.T) gave this noble name "Islam" to men of faith for all time. He says:

...The path of your father Ibrahim, It is He Who has named you Muslims, both before and in this (Revelation)... (Holy Qur'an 22:78)

Prophet Noah (PBUH) said to his people:

But if you turn away (from accepting my doctrine of Islamic Monotheism) then no reward have I asked of you; my reward is only from Allah and I have been commanded to be of the Muslims (those who submit to Allah's will). (Holy Qur'an 10:72)

Abraham and his son Ishma'el (PBUT) continuously prayed asking Allah (S.W.T.) to make them Muslims who submit to Allah's Will:

Our Lord! And make us submissive unto You, and of our offspring a nation submissive unto You, and show us our *Manāsik* (all the ceremonies of pilgrimage and Umrah) And accept our repentance. Truly, You are the One Who accepts repentance, the Most Merciful. (Holy Qur'an 2:128).

Jacob (PBUH) gathered his children before he died and advised them to hold and follow Abraham's (PBUH) religion, Islam:

When His Lord said to him, "submit (i.e. be a Muslim)!" He said, "I have submitted myself as a Muslim to the Lord of the Universe, (mankind, Jinn and all that exist). And this (submission to Allah, Islam) was enjoined by Ibrahim (Abraham) upon his sons, and so did Jacob; "Oh my sons! Allah has chosen for you the (true) religion; then die not except in the Faith of Islam. Or Were you witnesses when death approached Ya'qub (Jacob)? When he said to his sons: "What will you worship after me?" They said: "We shall worship Thy God and the God of thy fathers, of Abraham, Isma'il and Isaac,- the one (True) God: and To Him we submit (in Islam)." (Holy Qur'an 2:131-133).

Moses (PBUH) also asked his people to obey the Islamic Laws, which they accepted. He said:

And Musa (Moses) said: "O my people! If you have (really) believed in Allah, then put your trust in Him if you are Muslims (those who submit to Allah's will). (Holy Qur'an 10:84)

Pharaoh's magicians accepted his call and said:

Our Lord! Pour out on us patience and cause us to die as Muslims." (Holy Qur'an 7:126).

Joseph (PBUH) asked Allah (S.W) to help him be a Muslim until he died and to gather him with the righteous Muslims:

You are my protector and Guardian in this world and in the Hereafter. Cause me to die as a Muslim (the one submitting to your will), and join me with the righteous. (Holy Qur'an 12:101).

The final prophet, Mohammad (PBUH), clarified the oneness of the Prophets' religion. He said:

...I am more entitled to Jesus the son of Mary than anyone in this life and in the Hereafter, all prophets are brothers, they are from different mothers, but their religion is one.²¹

Thus, the religion of all prophets is one religion, built on one base, which is to believe in the oneness of Allah (S.W.T), to worship Him alone, and to follow his commandments.

This is Islam, the religion that Allah (S.W.T) accepts alone, the only right and perfect, true and completed religion of monotheism recognized by Allah who has chosen this religion for all human beings.²²

...This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion... (Q5:3)

Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam (Q3:19)

And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the hereafter he will be one of the losers' (Q3:85)

That is the message of Islam given to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) who preached and spread it in Makkah for 13 years and in Medina for 10 years in the seventh century. During this period, thousands of people accepted Islam and practiced it.²³ Those who heard and accepted the messages of Islam were admonished to pass it to others through *Da'wah* as the Prophet (peace be upon him) state in a long Hadith that...

It is incumbent upon those who are present to inform those who are absent because those who are absent might comprehend (what I have said) better than the present audience.²⁴

In response to that, Muslims continued to carry the banner of Islamic *Da'wah* to wherever they went. The religion of Islam which started in Makkah soon engulfed the Arabian Peninsula and continued to spread everywhere. North, South, East and West of the Peninsular began to feel the impact of the faith. M. Ruthven and A. Nanji lamented that;

The rapid spread of Islam acted as a formidable force of change in the Old World. By the end of the reign of Umar Ibn al-kḥaṭṭab (d.644), the whole of the Arabian Peninsula was conquered, together with most of the Sasanian Empire, as well as the Syrian and Egyptian provinces of Byzantium.²⁵

The spread of Islam to North Africa during the era of the Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-kḥaṭṭab through his commander 'Amr b. al-Aaṣ who reached Egypt and brought it under the control of the Muslims, and 'Uqba b. Nāfi' who also brought North Africa into the Caliphate paved way for the expansion of the religion to other parts of Africa. After the establishment of Islam in Egypt and some parts of North Africa, *Da'wah* expanded from these areas and reached the peoples of Africa south of the ṣahra'a' through the famous trade routes. The Muslims used these well established trade routes as a means of propagation of Islam. West Africa had a well established trade links with North Africa before this time through important caravan routes of Sijilmasa to Awdaghost trade route through Taghaza which linked the area of Morocco with ancient Ghana. Also there is yet another route among others, which linked Tripoli to Kanem and passed through Fezzan and Bilma. It was through these trade routes that Islam penetrated into Kanem Borno and other areas of West Africa through the Muslim merchants who sojourn these caravan routes.²⁶ It seems the first contact of Islam and the people of Borno is difficult to come by, what seems possible was that through these trading routes, People, goods and ideas moved freely and it is through them that the religion of Islam was spreaded to the *Bilād al-Sudan* area. Islam first entered into the Northern Nigeria through Kanem – Borno area; the first contact with Islam was probably in the 7th century C.E. (667 C.E. /46 A. H) when 'Uqba bin Nafi' founder of Qairawān arrived in the area of Kavar. The route through Kavar to Fezzan made Kanem to have regular contact with Muslims and the Muslim world. In this way Islam took four centuries of gradual penetration before its consolidation through official support.

The above assumption notwithstanding, the exact date for the introduction of Islam to Kanem-Borno remains uncertain as historians had differences of opinion to that effect. However, most historians are of the opinion that Islam reached Africa south of the ṣahra' via the trade routes. Martin observed that by the seventh century C. E. the Muslims were not only crossing and re-crossing the ṣahra' but were also the masters of these trade routes.²⁷ Accordingly, these trade routes provided immediate means for the penetration of Islam into Kanem-Borno.²⁸

Though most of the Historians agreed that the trade routes have provided a gateway through which Islam penetrated into Africa South of the Sahara, the actual date could not be unanimously agreed upon, however, it could be said that Kanem-Borno have witnessed many currents and waves of Islamic influence. It seems that the first indication for the introduction of Islam to the boarders of Kanem-Borno was the expedition of 'Amr Ibn al-Aaṣ from Egypt to Libya as far as Waddan and to the south and east of Tripoli. It was followed by the expedition of 'Uqba Ibn Nāfi' in about 46 A. H. / 666 which penetrated as far as Fezzan and the area of Kavar (Kavar oases), since trade on this route continued up to the area of Kanem, it could be possible that Islamic influence also penetrated into Kanem in those days.²⁹ The Borno records (letter of privilege) also made it clear that Islam was introduced to Kanem Borno by a learned scholar Muhammad Ibn Mani in the eleventh century during the reign of Umme Jilmi (d. 479/1097 C.E.).³⁰ An examination of the letter of appreciation issued to Muhammad Ibn Mani for his effort on Islamization of the area confirm to us that the actual Islamization must have taken place before the arrival of Ibn Mani, since four kings of Borno had learnt to recite the Qur'an before Mai Umme and therefore, it is improbable for a pagan king to recite the Qur'an.³¹ There is also an earlier mention of Kanem in the records of historians. Al-Yaqubi, a 9th century historian who stayed in Egypt has mentioned the Zaghawa as those who lived in Kanem, "their dwellings are huts and they have no towns."³² Moreover, al-Bakri writing at the end of the eleventh century referred to Kanem as a remote area and scarcely anyone reaches them." But the presence of the descendants of the Umayyad who maintained their tradition in Kanem is also established. Subsequent historians after al-Bakri down to the fifteen century were referring to Kanem as the Land of the Muslims and Islam has penetrated it through the following pattern.³³

That the Islamization of Kanem was suggested as a result of the *Da'wah* activities of Muslim traders and itinerant scholars moving along the Trans-Sahara trade routes. Islam penetrated through the central Trans-Saharan route which passes through Tripoli, Jabal Nafusa, Fezzan, Zawila, Kawar to the Chad Basin. By the end of the 12th century indigenous system of Islamic education has produced its competent scholars who were not only famous in Borno but known to the outside world. The celebrated Kanem poet Abu-Ishaq Ibrahim al-Ya'qub al-Kanimi visited al-Mohad ruler Ya'qub al-Mansur 580-591 AH/1184-1194 C. E. and recited to him some words of praise. With the increasing number of educated elites both learned and students, the Sultan of Borno had to seek the assistance of Al-Azhar University for admission.

As for the introduction and spread of Islam in Hausa states, it made its first appearance after reaching Kanem Borno as early as the 12th century, a period when Borno traders were said to have come to Hausaland. The Hausa states, however, appear to have remained outside the massive influence of Islam until sometime around the first quarter of the 14th century when Hausaland witnessed the influx of Muslim traders and itinerant scholars who came from Mali, Abdullah al-Ilori stated that:

The people of Kano were converted to Islam by the Wangarawa who visited them after reaching Katsina, and Wangarawa received Islam from the hands of Arabs and Barbers. The first to become a Muslim among the chiefs of Kano was Uthman (zamnaqawi), then Kanjij, then his son Umar who study the Qur'an, Fiqh and Hadith, he also bring closer to him scholars and established the Shari'ah. Then came after him Muhammad Rumfa who raised the status of Islam in Kano. It was during his reign that (famous scholars such as) al-Maghili and 'Abdur-Rahman Zayati and others visited Kano.³⁴

Earlier before the acceptance of Islam by the king of Kano that of Katsina had accepted the religion, Muhammad Korau (c.1320-53 C.E) was the king of Katsina. As the name "Muhammad" suggests, the king must have been a Muslim. In kano too, Muhammad Korau's contemporary, king 'Uthman Zamnaqawi, (1343-49 C.E) bore a Muslim name. During the reign of his successor 'Ali Yaji (1349-85 C.E), steps were taken to spread Islam among the subjects. A mosque was built in Kano city and every town was ordered to observe the daily prayers.

The work of spreading the new faith was also made easier by the continued arrival, at different intervals, of new missionaries. For instance, during the reign of Sultan Ya'qub of Kano (1452-63 A.D) a group of Fulani missionaries arrived in Hausaland from Malle, bringing with them a new set of books on subjects which hitherto had not received attention from the scholars in Hausaland. These were books dealing with Tawhid (Islamic monotheism) and etymology, prior to this; the only books studied seem to have been the Holy Qur'an, books on Hadith (traditions) and on law.³⁵

It was during the reign of Ya'qub's successor, Sultan Muhammad Rumfa that Islam became firmly and permanently established in Kano. It was during his time that the feast of 'Id-al-Fiṭr which marks the end of Ramaḍan fast was first celebrated in Hausaland.³⁶ This was a time of great Islamic revival not only in Kano but also in Katsina, then under Sultan Ibrahim Maje (1494-1520 C.E).³⁷ It seems that the whole of Hausa land witnessed an increase in Islamic influence at the time. This might have been due to increased contact between Hausaland and Songhai which was also at the time undergoing a great Islamic revival initiated by Sultan Askia Muhammad. For instance, Kanta of Kebbi had been a governor for Askia Muhammad of Songhai before he revolted and established himself as an independent king of Kebbi.³⁸

It was also around this time, too, that the famous juris-consult, Muhammad b. 'Abd-Karim al-Maghili (d. 1504 C.E) came to Hausaland in 1492 C. E, his visit is considered as a land mark in the annals of Islamization process of Hausaland.³⁹ He was credited, according to traditional accounts, with the introduction of some Muslim preachers whom were said to have come originally from Madinah.⁴⁰ He spent some time in Katsina and taught both there and in Kano where he was said to have written, at the request of the Sultan, a book "The Obligation of princess" which set out the proper way to administer an Islamic state.⁴¹ Another famous Muslim scholar and contemporary of al-Maghili, the erudite polymath, Jalal al-Din Al-ṣuyūṭi (d. 1505 A.D) came to Hausa land about the same time. The two seem to have become involved in a dispute over many questions.⁴²

According to Gwandu, although Islam had reached Hausaland as early as the beginning of the 14th century and had become firmly established by the end of the 15th century, this does not mean that it was accepted by all the people of the area. In this connection therefore, what seems to have happened was that:

Muslim traders from the north and from Malle came and settled in the Hausa states. They formed the nuclei of Islamic communities, which gradually expanded and which were from time to time reinforced by fresh arrivals of missionaries. As time went by, the surrounding indigenous culture came to be more and more influenced by Islam. The first to be converted were the traders, the chiefs and their courtiers. Once in contact with the new religion, the chiefs saw it as a great asset. Its adoption boosted their image among their pagan subjects. Some of them found it convenient, for selfish reasons, to adopt at least a veneer of Islam,

while at the same time they were not prepared to give up their traditional religion in its totality. As a result the two cultures, Islamic and indigenous came to exist side by side, and at times merged to form a kind of indigenized Islam.⁴³

Again, there were many chiefs who accepted Islam with all their hearts and were totally committed to it. With the help of pious scholars, such committed chiefs geared their efforts in maintaining and spreading pure, uncontaminated Islam. With the conversion of these dedicated chiefs and the effort of scholars, mass populations were influenced to accept Islam. They were anxious to follow the new prestigious Islamic faith whose demands were so simple and that its adoption required little effort on their part. The missionaries (*Du'at*) would, no doubts, have taught the people that by the simple pronouncement of the formula of faith they became Muslims. They would also have taught them how to pray, fast, give out alms to the poor and perform the pilgrimage. None of these pillars of Islam would be regarded as unduly difficult by the common people.⁴⁴ This notwithstanding, it must be realized that one should not thought that everyone had become a Muslim. But still very many people were still animists, and many common people also mixed Islam with un-Islamic trends;

these common people were mainly concerned with earning their living, and that they were not aiming at becoming learned doctors in Islamic Law. Very often they contravened many of the laws laid down by Islam. They continued to participate in some idolatrous rites of animism like making sacrifices and libation to various objects of worship. They may have failed to observe the rituals of Islam through ignorance or neglect. In social and economic matters they followed their own indigenous customs and practices.⁴⁵

There were also some who, while calling themselves scholars, were ignorant of even their individual duties. They employ every conceivable trick and deception in order to win the recognition and respects of the rulers and, veneration of the masses. They seized every opportunity to make a show of knowledge, often resorting to strange and unrecognized books as a source for their views. Their interpretation of law was extremely wild and weird, and they were ready to go to any length to establish their hold on the simple-minded peasants.⁴⁶ This was the situation in Hausaland until the reform movement of Shaykh 'Uthman Ibn Foduye.

II. Conclusion

Shaykh 'Uthman b. Fodiye started his preaching at the age of 20 in about 1188 A. H. /1774 C. E. He combined both preaching and studying at the same time. In the formative period of his preaching, he dedicated his time in explaining the fundamentals of Islam. His Da'wah (preaching) received the response of many followers which encouraged him to continue and expand it beyond his home town to other parts of Hausaland. In *Tazyin al-Waraqah* his brother 'Abdullah stated:

Then we rose up with the Shaykh helping him in mission work for religion. He travelled for that purpose to the east and to the west, calling the people to the religion of Allah by his preaching and his Qasidahs in other languages and destroying customs contrary to Muslim law.⁴⁷

The Da'wah of Shaykh 'Uthman bn Foduye had tremendously brought about positive changes in the understanding and practice of Islam. His Da'wah called for the reform of the faith, and devotional practices of Islam and also the practice of good moral standard, he also advice the people to abandon customs contrary to Islam. Many scholars in the contemporary period are emulating the Da'wah methods of the Shaykh. He and his lieutenants had left many manuscripts which many Muslims are of the opinion that those intellectual heritage are capable of ameliorating the pathetic conditions the Muslims are facing in Nigeria today.

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