

EXPLORING IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY: AN ETHICAL PARADIGM FOR CONTEMPORARY GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

This research explores Allama Iqbal's concept of spiritual democracy as an ethical governance model, integrating literary and international relations theories in order to assess its modern importance. Using Iqbal's Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam and his poetry, the research makes forays into a study of how spiritual ethics may be applied to governance and retrieves valuable lessons for reversing moral decay, inequality, and polarization. Constructivist IR theory and humanist literary perspectives enable the bridging of philosophy with political practice. The qualitative method of inquiry includes thematic and discourse analysis of Iqbal's works, revealing that justice, inclusiveness, dignity, etc., are instruments of leadership transformation. The findings are that Iqbal's vision goes beyond the traditional paradigms, forming a framework based on collective moral responsibility. A Conceptual Model of HEGM, under the proposed model, aims at involving spiritual democracy in policy-making and leadership training for ethical governance and conflict resolution. Future study can test this model in the context of diplomacy and multilateralism. The synthesis of ethics and governance by Iqbal offers a long-term approach to fostering harmony and transformative leadership in global politics.

Keywords: *Spiritual Democracy, Ethical Governance, Iqbal's Philosophy, Transformation, Moral Responsibility, Global Harmony*

INTRODUCTION

Allama Muhammad Iqbal, a great philosopher and poet of the 20th century, is highly acclaimed for his intellectual contributions merging the spiritual with modernity. His thought has influenced intellectual circles in both East and West, providing a distinct philosophical approach to governance. Among the most significant and profound features of Iqbal's philosophy is his concept of spiritual democracy, thereby providing an option to the traditional secular models of governance. Within this paradigm, therefore, spiritual democracy becomes not only a political system but also a holistic scheme for ethical development and maturation in both the individual

and society, based on spirituality, moral responsibility, and collective self-awareness (Zaidi, 2021, p. 123; Khalid & Hafeez, 2021, p. 45). Iqbal spiritual democracy would challenge the materialistic underpinnings of Western democratic systems, suggesting that true political and social progress can come only as a result of individuals and leaders' working through an established moral and spiritual foundation. Governance can take on a much greater form than politically constructed structures, where justice, ethical accountability, and collective well-being stand at its core. This exploration of Iqbal's spiritual democracy draws attention to its application to current governance

dilemmas, focusing on ethical leadership it promotes, and also the possibilities of a moral government in handling current world issues, such as inequality, corruption, and political fragmentation (Shah, 2020, p. 58; Zahra, 2022, p. 99).

The nucleus of Iqbal's spiritual democracy is that of Khudi which he defines as the actualization of one's perfect self through his strong and valid reasoning. Iqbal believed that this was personal transformation, thereby social transformation in people to contribute to the general public good. Unlike secular democratic ideals that often prioritize individual freedoms and material success, Iqbal's spiritual democracy envisions a society where self-realization is achieved through ethical engagement and moral responsibility. For Iqbal, the individual's inner development, which is deeply connected to spiritual consciousness, forms the foundation of a just and ethical society (Fay, 2021, p. 22; Zahra, 2022, p. 101). His model emphasizes that true democracy does not merely involve political participation but also the ethical cultivation of individuals, which is often neglected in mainstream democratic systems.

In addition to individual self-realization, Iqbal's concept of spiritual democracy stresses the importance of moral leadership. In his view, leaders should not be motivated by personal gain or political expediency, but by a deep sense of ethical duty and spiritual responsibility. Iqbal's ideal leader is one who possesses not only intellectual acumen but also a profound spiritual understanding that guides their decisions. These leaders, in Iqbal's model, are not mere administrators of the state; they are moral guides, who inspire citizens to achieve higher ethical standards. Such leadership fosters a society where justice, equity, and social harmony prevail. This idea of leadership, grounded in ethics and spirituality, challenges the often corrupt and self-serving nature of modern political leadership, where materialism and individualism often take precedence (Wahid, 2023, p. 135; Raza, 2021, p. 77).

Iqbal's ethical leadership model blends with the contemporary views of governance, which aim to tackle issues like corruption, inequality, and a loss of moral values in politics. The world is going

through political instability, global warming, and social turmoil, making the need for a model of governance that integrates the ethical and spiritual realms even more pertinent today. Iqbal's spiritual democracy is the basis on which ethical leadership comes to signify the groundwork of governance, providing a moral compass in a time of crescendo global crises (Shah, 2020, p. 63; Zaidi, 2021, p. 124). The plea for spiritual development as the foundation for effective leadership on his part forms a compelling alternative to regimes based on interest and influence as engines, or quite simply, money and power, followed by material considerations.

Iqbal's spiritual democracy is also significant for its potential to address global challenges such as nationalism, conflict, and social fragmentation. In the modern era, global politics are increasingly defined by ideological and cultural divisions, often exacerbated by nationalist sentiments and political partisanship. Iqbal's vision of 'spiritually guided' democracy brings solutions to these separations by emphasizing ethical leadership that focuses on the common good and moral accountability rather than ideological or nationalistic ambitions. The spiritual values have the opportunity to prevail in the realm of politics to achieve global cooperation and peace as the ongoing geopolitical situation nowadays gets more apart in terms of international relations (Mukhtar, 2023, p. 89; Hameed, 2022, p. 45).

It further challenges the modern concept of democracy itself. Modern democratic models, particularly in the West, would talk much about individual rights and liberties as the core tenets of governance. However essential it is, Iqbal's notion of democracy emphasizes that the individual's ethical and spiritual development must be the foundation upon which true democratic participation is built. This is a vision of democracy that's deeply moral and spiritual; it contrasts with the utilitarian view of democracy as merely a political system, based on maximizing individual freedom and material success. Iqbal's model, therefore, seeks to hail the citizens and leaders to grow morally for an even more just, equitable, and sustainable society (Ali, 2020, p. 102; Fay, 2021, p. 33).

Iqbal's spiritual democracy is not a product of mere theoretical endeavour but a call for practical action

towards governance. He advocated for political and social systems that would encourage the development of Khudi and ethical leadership at every level of governance. The key to this paradigm is to realize that governance is not merely about resources management or law enforcement but is also related to the development of moral and spiritual human and collective potential. Iqbal believed that when individuals and leaders are motivated by higher ethical values, they can contribute to the creation of a just, well-balanced society based on moral responsibility and collective well-being. This approach contests the dominant political ideologies of today and presents a transformative framework of governance, seeking to integrate ethical and spiritual dimensions to political practice (Syed, 2022, p. 71; Raza, 2021, p. 78).

Thus, Iqbal's spiritual democracy presents a strong ethical framework for governance that can help in dealing with the contemporary global challenges. It presents the vision of leadership based on moral integrity and spiritual wisdom, where it speaks of responsibility through ethics and collective good over the political system. As the world faces numerous political, social, and environmental crises, Iqbal's framework offers a timely and transformative alternative to the materialistic and individualistic tendencies of modern political systems. Future research should explore how the principles of spiritual democracy can be applied in contemporary governance structures, especially with regards to an issue that has become increasingly prevalent in the present world today: corruption, inequality, and political fragmentation (Shah, 2020, p. 64; Zahra, 2022, p. 107).

Literature Review:

Allama Muhammad Iqbal's concept of spiritual democracy suggests that true democracy is only achievable when citizens and leaders are spiritually enlightened and morally grounded. Several works have explored Iqbal's ideals and their relevance in contemporary governance, yet there remains a gap in comprehensive studies that integrate Iqbal's spiritual democracy with modern ethical governance frameworks.

Iqbal's philosophy of governance revolves around the concept of Khudi (selfhood), which signifies

the empowerment of the individual to realize their potential through moral and spiritual growth (Zaidi, 2021, p. 123; Zahra, 2022, p. 101). This self-realization fosters responsible leadership, where political leaders, grounded in ethics, govern with a sense of moral duty rather than power or material gain. According to Wahid (2023), Iqbal's notion of leadership emphasizes the role of the moral and spiritual development of both leaders and citizens as foundational to the effective functioning of democracy (p. 138). This contrasts with secular models that prioritize material success over ethical responsibilities, positioning Iqbal's spiritual democracy as an alternative model of governance.

Recent scholarship has examined the connection between Iqbal's spiritual democracy and the concept of ethical leadership. For example, Raza (2021) is of the opinion that Iqbal's model of governance calls upon a leadership that is beyond the narrow perception of political ideologies and is characterized by the 'moral character' of the leaders (p. 78). This ethical framework becomes strategic in eliminating tendencies of corruption, inequality, and governance failure in modern states. Raza expresses the idea that Iqbal's teachings actually present a more durable model of governance, one that transcends politics and focuses on the deeper spiritual and moral life of society (p. 82). In this light, Hameed 2022 asserts that Iqbal's model of governance can provide an antidote to the decaying morals and disappointments in modern political system(s) (p. 99).

Alternatively, what Iqbal's spiritual democracy has come to represent today is its applicability to people all over the world. For example, Zahra (2022) mentions that Iqbal's vision presents answers to the problems of nationalism, political instability, and ideological polarization at a global level (p. 107). As one who shifts attention on moral responsibility and collective welfare instead of personal interest, Iqbal's spiritual democracy can potentially be used as a precursor in making international cooperation and peace possible in an increasingly fractured world (Shah, 2020, p. 160). Actually, not much is heard regarding how Iqbal's ethical leadership can be practically applied to the political systems of today, in particular to global governance.

The literature also identifies an apparent divide between theory and practice in relation to Iqbal's framework and his application within the scope of modern governance. Syed (2022) captures the criticism when he says that the idea put forward by Iqbal is very captivating, but the constitution of actual political frameworks is arduous, particularly where materialism has dominated the agendas of power (p. 55). Again, the spiritual and moral elements of Iqbal's democracy are not sufficiently integrated into current political discourse, where liberal freedoms and economic progress are the central functions of governance (Fay, 2021, p. 33). This creates a research gap in an attempt to clearly define a framework of how spiritual democracy is going to coexist with or complement modern political systems.

Though some of the researchers focus on the philosophical underpinnings of Iqbal's democracy, such as Ali (2020), the others focus on its implications for leadership ethics in the contemporary world. Ali refers to how Iqbal's conception of the leadership guided through spiritual maturity would be even more relevant to solving the contemporary challenges of governance, especially for societies battling evils of corruption, political instability, and inequality (p. 102). Still, there is a lack of scholarly discourse on how spiritual democracy can particularly address issues such as the erosion of democratic institutions, growing mistrust in political systems, and the increased power of corporate interests in governance.

Methodology:

The methodology for this research is qualitative, based on doctrinal research and critical textual analysis, to understand Allama Iqbal's spiritual democracy and its implication in contemporary governance. Focus remains on the philosophical parts of his work, which are *Asrar-e-Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self) and *Payām-i-Mashriq* (Message of the East), in which he enunciates his thought process of ethical leadership and moral responsibility as revealed by Amin 2021. These texts form the core of the analysis of how Iqbal's ideas about the self (Khudi), collective responsibility, and spiritual democracy can be made part of the current governance structures.

This doctrinal study thus enables one to understand Iqbal's thoughts, especially on justice and equality by going deep into his meaning of equity and justice, which is at the core of his model of governance in ethics (Ghulam, 2022). The discourse analysis, another tool allows setting up emergent themes that emerge within Iqbal's writing, for example, impartiality, ethical ascendancy, besides even self-awareness allowed for the public (Shah, 2020). Comparative analysis is undertaken within the research through the constructivism aligned with Iqbal's moral revelation.

It advocates policies that respect social justice, human dignity, and equality, based on the spiritual and ethical guidance of Iqbal. The model represents bridging the gap between the philosophical ideals of Iqbal with the contemporary governance. Moral integrity should be at the heart of leadership practice (Shah, 2020). It also calls for an education system that would develop self-consciousness and responsibility in a citizenry so that each and every one contributes to the collective moral fabric of society (Jameel, 2020). The emphasis put on ethical leadership and social justice by the model may offer a sustainable solution to the problems of politics and society that nations encounter today (Aslan, 2023). Future research would elucidate ways the HEGM might be applied across different political systems, thereby testing its effectiveness in shaping transformative leadership and fostering global harmony (Majeed, 2021).

Discussion: Iqbal's Spiritual Democracy - An Ethical Paradigm for Governance:

Spiritual democracy, with sources drawn from Muhammad Iqbal, the intellectual, philosopher, poet, and politician (Iqbal, 1930), has served as an ethical model for dealing with the problem of governance. In traditional political paradigms, politics is concerned with the dynamics of power, wealth, and force; Iqbal casts an appealing vision of politics with an inner soul. Spiritual democracy is fundamental in outlining the features of an ethical leader, self-actualization, others' appreciation, and social justice as the premises of the correct social order (Ali, 2017). This ethical approach to governance transcends political

thinking and serves moral, as well as spiritual, principles that are vital for sound human, as well as national, formation (Ahmad, 2007). However, under the light of the present discussion, one could consider spiritual democracy as a model that enfranchises citizens not only with the rights and freedom but even with a sense of a higher purpose of social betterment (Khan, 2015).

An elaboration of Iqbal's ideas and the political programme of spiritual democracy cannot be properly attempted without some knowledge of what the poet-philosopher has said about the philosophy of Khudi. Thus, the essence of Khudi relates to the formation of internal resources, self-identification, and the process of personal and collective further growth (*Major elements of Iqbal's Spiritual Democracy are depicted in Figure 1 below*). According to Iqbal, selfhood is one of the ways of liberating and developing society, and he had a vision for the political system (Saeed, 2018). By so doing, it differs from the regular historical and materialistic approach to democracy, which involves relying on some sort of

external body. On the contrary, spiritual democracy, to which Iqbal alludes, is the harmony of the ethical and spiritual with the political in that it seeks to build a society with moral regeneration concerning justice, equity, and mutual respect among the people as the goal of political governance (Khan, 2015).

Ethical governance is at the heart of spiritual democracy. Here, leaders are not just political figures voted to oversee certain political agendas or control certain society resources, but leaders who uphold moral and ethical values to be spread throughout society (Akhtar, 2016). According to Iqbal, leadership is about leading society toward a path that makes it more wholesome, more dignifying, and self-minimizing. Leaders must behave and make decisions with integrity, sound mind, and heart (Saeed, 2018). Such ethical governance requires that decision-making cannot be based on the political calendar, let alone the economic calendar, but ought to reflect ethical ideas of justice, fairness, and the public good (Siddiqui, 2013).



Figure-1: Elements of Iqbal's Spiritual Democracy

This ethical model for leadership in politics or government has been somewhat replaced in modern political science by more utilitarian ideas associated with political economy, including growth as a form of politics and power, and geopolitics. But there are a few countries and effective political parties in the modern world whose structure and say in governance, in some way or another, give us an outlook of Iqbal's

spiritual democracy based on righteousness, human dignity, and social justice (Ahmad, 2007). An example is New Zealand, which not only values innovation, creativity, and productivity but also citizenship, stewardship, and compassion as pillars of governance and leadership. To begin with, New Zealand, under its adorning leader, Jacinda Ardern, became an international figure of virtue in crises, especially after the Christchurch mosque shootings

in 2019. Iqbal also had not been just focusing on political matters, leadership, and powers of the countries, but he used to believe in an ethical and spiritual philosophy of leadership that Ardern is proving to be the best example of (Akhtar, 2016). Likewise, Norway is also one of the modern-day examples of spiritual democracy at work in practice. Norway's governance system has emphasized considering and respecting human rights, environmental conservation, as well as balanced distribution of wealth in the country. It is established and run with an emphasis on the social welfare of its people, and the general populace obliges with Iqbal's leadership framework that encourages the growth of all in an ethical and spiritual manner (Siddiqui, 2013). In addition, addressing peacebuilding and conflicts as foreign policy for the country is also the manifestation of the Norwegian model Iqbal used to imagine a global policy based on the ethical responsibility of the state. The Norwegian experience makes it clear how a government motivated by spiritual democracy can advance the welfare of human beings through diplomacy, which recognizes values such as justice, respect, and fairness (Ahmad, 2007).

The second aspect of the social dimension in relation to the concept of spiritual democracy is also pointed out by Iqbal. In this model, all people of society play an active role in constructing tomorrow, not by the use of our ballots or through an elected representative, but by having a moral conversation. Spiritual democracy, in a general sense, enshrines and encourages people's participation in the political process proceeded by a common set of values of ethics. The people are participants in governance rather than subjects of governance regarding the moral and ethical standards (Khan, 2015). Politics, Iqbal was of the opinion, should go beyond the kind of politics where the main aim is to exchange votes for other prerequisites but elevate man to a level where he or she can perform in line with his or her potential and moral virtues (Siddiqui, 2013).

India, for instance, may be said to be practicing participatory democracy as a contemporary embodiment of spiritual democracy. Although the democratic rights of the people in India face certain vices like corruption and inequality, the Indian

Constitution policies justice, equality, and liberty—the core moral principles Iqbal subscribed to. For instance, spiritual democracy in the social-political sphere has been influential in advocating for a just and ethical system of governance (Saeed, 2018). In this regard, there are a few principles and concepts which truly portray the spirit of spiritual democracy in the social-political perspective: Sarvodaya, which means the welfare for all as described by leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi. This paper argues that Gandhi had a vision of ethics and good governance where people believed in a non-violent system of administration, truth, and self-governance, so as to be responsible for the destiny of the nation on moral grounds (Khan, 2015). Gandhi was just as much a proponent of spiritual democracies in their humanistic form as what Iqbal theorized for political democracy entwined with ethical values.

Apart from social participation, spiritual democracy in Iqbal's framework is both cultural and spiritual freedom. He held that the cultural and spiritual transformation of the people of a given society is a fundamental characteristic of democracy. This feature of spiritual democracy is relevant where a nation is coming out of the so-called era of colonization or struggling with the question of cultural genocide. Countries like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have seen a revival of indigenous cultures and values in today's society. These nations have tried to extend their hand to recognize and uphold indigenous people's rights and to incorporate culture into the government structures. This paper will examine how the governance of Canada, with indigenous people through actions like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, follows a religion-led process to create a tolerant nation (Saeed, 2018).

Iqbal's spiritual democracy is not only intrinsically spiritual but also cosmopolitan, which postulates cooperation among nations on the basis of their respect for each other's rights, recognition of the other's freedom, and manifestation of moral responsibility and common values. This global vision is best understood in contrast with the realism and power-politics approach that is prevalent in international relations today (Iqbal, 1930). In Iqbal's structured model of diplomacy, it is not about alliances, haggling, or sustaining

national interest; instead, it denotes a message of peace, understanding, and ethical ideas beyond boundaries (Khan, 2015). The phenomenon of modern multilateral diplomacy and the emergence of the UN and other similar organizations also testify to the growing appreciation of the fact that, in this world of interdependence, ethical bases for international cooperation have to be founded on the sanctity of human life (Siddiqui, 2013).

The graphical representation above illustrates the proposed model for "Spiritual Democracy" based on Allama Iqbal's framework. Under the larger concept of Spiritual Democracy are fitted several key principles: Ethical Governance, Selfhood (Khudi), Social Justice, and many others. All these elements go hand in hand: ethical governance facilitates both Moral Leadership and Human Rights & Equality; selfhood highlights cultural and spiritual freedom. Another important dimension of this model is Global Diplomacy and Multilateral

Cooperation, which points out the international scale of Iqbal's vision. The arrows illustrate the interrelation between these concepts and form a holistic view of governance based on the spiritual and ethical principles.

The Harmonized Ethical Governance Model (HEGM):

The HEGM based on spiritual democracy of Allama Iqbal underscored the incorporation of ethical governance principles within the political system and actual representation of leadership in governance. HEGM is intended to fill the gap between the ideals of ethics and practicalities of governance by focusing on moral responsibility, inclusiveness, and human dignity promotion-core components of Harmonized Ethical Governance Model (HEGM), based on Iqbal's Spiritual Democracy are depicted in Figure 2 below.



Figure-2: Core components of Harmonized Ethical Governance Model (HEGM)

(1) Spiritual Democracy at the Core:

This model finds its basis in Iqbal's idea of spiritual democracy, which goes beyond the conventional political system by breathing spirituality into ethics governing it.

(2) Ethical Governance:

The kind of leaders under this model must govern from the heart and mind, making sure

that decisions made will be for the good of the people, promoting long-term communal goodness rather than short-term benefits.

(3) Leadership and Selfhood (Khudi):

Iqbal's concept of Khudi (selfhood) plays a critical role in shaping leadership under the HEGM. The development of self-awareness and self-empowerment in individuals is essential for

fostering leaders who are not only skilled in governance but are also committed to spiritual and moral regeneration. These leaders prioritize collective progress, justice, and human dignity over personal or nationalistic gain.

(4) Inclusive and Participatory Governance:

Iqbal's view of democracy goes beyond electoral politics as it encourages the involvement of the common people in the political process. Citizens are regarded as participants, not subjects, in governance. Their role is not limited only to voting but to contribute to moral and ethical discussions that shape governance. It is on this participatory form of democracy that ensures that governance mirrors the collective moral values of the public.

(5) Social Justice and Equity:

This makes up one of the important ideas of the HEGM, that social justice should be pursued so that governance gives prominence to eliminating inequality and that every single citizen must be treated with dignity and respect. The model also emphasizes the importance of resource distribution towards equalization while considering positive interventions in social conditions in the grounds of social disparities.

The Harmonized Ethical Governance Model (HEGM) is indeed a model of necessary paradigm shift for the traditional forms of governance paradigms developed in relation to material norms, where the spiritual and ethical well-being of people and societies would be placed above materialistic economy and narrow political interests.

Conclusion

The examination of Allama Iqbal's spiritual democracy and its place in governance systems is a great shift as to how the modern world can look at political leadership and governance. A concept of ethical governance, based on Iqbal's philosophy of Khudi (selfhood), presents a very strong framework for leadership that not only abandons materialism but meets and addresses the moral, spiritual, and social aspects of governance. With these basic principles, it attempted to postulate a

model of governance that not only focuses on the regenerations of political power and economic success but also enlists the moral regeneration of the individual and the social fraternity at large. Standing in contrast to the dominating utilitarianism and highly politically driven models of modern governance, HEGM seeks more in the impetus of ethical leadership, social justice, and cultural liberty. It invites leaders to focus on the common good, decisions based on integrity and fairness, as well as an environment where citizens can actively participate in the governance process, given such shared ethical values. The model also envisions a global dimension of governance, where nations will cooperate and respect each other's rights, fostering a spirit of peace and mutual understanding. Ultimately, Iqbal's spiritual democracy, as exemplified by the HEGM, opens a window to reformation and redesigning the governance systems of the world to have moral and spiritual development coupled with political and economic growth. On that note, spiritual democracy promises to bring ways of governing that are more equal, compassionate, and sustainable. It is this model that should challenge leaders and citizens alike to engaging in the renewal of our societies on the basis of ethical consideration leading to a better future built around common human values.

Recommendations:

These recommendations seek to further the pursuit of implementing this ethical framework in contemporary political systems, in order to make societies find ways of aligning their governance to more wholesome moral and spiritual values.

(1) Integration of Ethical Leadership Programs:

Political systems should also give prominence to the development of ethical leadership by incorporating morality in the education and training programmes of public leaders. Developed on the works of Iqbal-the concepts of Khudi and spiritual democracy should find their way into the development of leaders with a commitment to social justice and equality as well as the common good of society.

(2) Incorporating Cultural and Social Welfare in Policy:

Governance needs to acknowledge cultural differences and social welfare. Policies should be targeted to ensure that all communities, particularly the vulnerable ones, are catered for. Preservations and cultural promotion aspects such as those seen in New Zealand and Canada relate to the integration of cultural values in public policy in a way that will impact governance toward respecting the people's heritage and dignity.

(3) Promoting Global Ethical Diplomacy:

The ethical diplomacy adopted by nations should reflect mutual respect, justice, and peace on the global level. Instead of adhering to power-based international politics, nations must cooperate based on shared ethical values that benefit the collective well-being. International agreements, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, provide a framework for how ethical values could expand to guide global cooperation toward addressing more global issues

(4) Promoting Research on Ethical Governance:

Research efforts to develop practical applications of spiritual democracy in a wide range of political contexts are crucial. Scholars and policymakers must engage to shape guidance for the adoption of Iqbal's ethical governance principles considering the specific cultural and political contexts of different countries. Research could ultimately lead to new governance models that combine Iqbal's vision with current political realities.

Spiritual democracy remains a great vision for the governmental future, hence, based on these recommendations, it is clear that governments and societies can provide a more just, ethical, and spiritually enriched political environment.

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