

# Surrendering Your Rights

by J. Oswald Sanders

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*J. Oswald Sanders emphasizes the importance of surrendering personal rights for the sake of the gospel and effective ministry.*

**Duration:** 43:47

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 9:3-27

**Topics:** "Surrender"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being willing to sacrifice leisure and pleasure in order to bless others. He discusses the right to receive material benefits for spiritual work and acknowledges that while he has this right, he has chosen not to exercise it. The speaker uses the analogy of a boxer who aims and strikes every blow, highlighting the importance of discipline and self-control in preaching the word of God. He also shares a story about a village that initially rejected the message of the preachers, but had a change of heart when they saw the physical toll it took on them. The sermon concludes with the message of not 'killing the horse' or neglecting oneself, but also recognizing when it is necessary to push oneself and make sacrifices in service to God.

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## Transcript

I want to speak about the exercise of our rights, and I'd like you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 9. 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Paul is speaking about his apostleship, and he's defending it. And in verse 3, he says, this is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and keep us? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.

Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope, and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop. If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap material benefits? If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Again in verse 18, what then is my reward? Just this, that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full

use of my right in the gospel.

And then later on, verse 22, he says, to the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I might share in its blessings.

And then in the final verses, there's that famous passage about the way in which he brought his body under discipline. One of the factors that made Paul the great man that he was, was his attitude to his rights. And in this passage, he gives an important part of his autobiography.

We learn more about Paul from the incidental references in his writings than we do from the historical passages in the Acts. He just opens his heart and shares his inner life. And in this passage, he is speaking about soul-winning effectiveness.

There are certain words that recur. I'm sure that in your Bible study, when you find constantly recurring words, you realize their importance. There are certain words that recur here.

You'll find that the word gospel recurs. This is the thing that is his main interest, the gospel. You'll find that the word right recurs time and again.

And you'll find that word win occurs time and again. And in this chapter, Paul is revealing the secret that made him the great and peerless soul-winner that he was. And from it, there emerges the fact that he had to renounce several rights which were perfectly legitimate in themselves.

And the renunciation of his rights was a very important thing to Paul because he saw that if he took full advantage of those rights, it would limit his ministry. And so rather than have a limited ministry, he renounced the rights and didn't make use of them. Four times, he asserts his rights in the gospel.

And three times, he claims that he hasn't used them. Well, I think this has got something to say to us. What is our attitude to our rights? Is it not true that today the great emphasis that people are putting is on our rights? Every group is standing up for their rights.

Well, rights are not wrong. Rights are rights. But there's something about rights that we need to recognize, and that is that rights can be surrendered.

They can be renounced. We've got the right to give up our rights. I don't know whether you have buses in Colorado.

I suppose you do. I go get on a bus, and I pay my fare, and I sit down on the seat. I have a right to that seat.

That's my seat. Nobody can tip me out. Policemen can't pull me out.

I've paid for it. It's my right. The bus is full.

A lady gets in. She's got a baby in one arm and a heavy bag of groceries in the other. I've got a right to my seat.

I can say, I will sit here. This is my right. But I also have the higher right to renounce my right.

And if I'm a gentleman, I'll do it. Now, it's exactly like that in the Christian life. There are certain things that are perfectly right, perfectly legitimate in themselves, and yet in the interests of the gospel, it's the gospel he's speaking about here, in order that we might win more, we suffer anything, Paul says.

We're willing to suffer anything if only we can win more. Well, then, that should color our attitude to our rights. In one of his books, Oswald Chambers said this, if we are willing to give up only the wrong things for Jesus, never let us talk about being in love for him.

Anyone will give up wrong things if he knows how. But are we prepared to give up the best we have for Jesus Christ? The only right a Christian has is the right to give up his rights. If we are to be the best for God, there must be victory in the realm of legitimate desire, as well as in the realm of unlawful indulgence.

Can I read that sentence again? There must be victory in the realm of legitimate desire, as well as in the realm of unlawful indulgence. Now, in 1 Corinthians 10.23, Paul says all things are lawful, but all things are not helpful. There are certain things which are right in themselves, and yet they won't help in the special situation in which you are placed.

And then you have the right of giving up that possibility. Paul knew that it was possible also to indulge legitimate things to an inordinate degree. And that's something that we need to look to and see that we are not indulging something which is right in itself to an inordinate degree, because that will limit our effectiveness in God's service.

In 1 Corinthians 6.12, Paul says that all things are lawful, but I will not be enslaved by any. You can be enslaved by things that are lawful. It's lawful to eat food, but you can get enslaved to it.

It's lawful to drink, but you can go to unlawful ends. And so Paul takes this ground, I will not be enslaved by anything. Here's the man of character.

I'm not going to allow any of these things to dominate my life. We've got to choose our priorities carefully, even in things that are right. We've got to get victory over the rights in our life, as well as victory over the wrongs.

I said yesterday morning about the way in which our Lord set a wonderful example in the renunciation of His rights. How He gave them up one after another, although He was the Son and Heir of all things, yet He gave up all, everything that He had for us men and for our salvation. And as He went through His life, if you study the life of our Lord from this angle, you'll see that the whole of His life was a progressive giving up of one right after another, until it came to the end, and He voluntarily gave up the right even to life itself.

From the moment He rose from His eternal throne and gave up His right to manifesting His equality with God, right to His very death, it was a continual surrender of His rights. And if we are good followers of the Lord, we will be of the same spirit and doing the same thing. Now, there were four areas in which Paul made reference to his personal rights, and he asserted that although he may legitimately have made use of them, he had exploited none of them to the full.

He may have exercised his rights to a certain extent, but he said, I haven't used them to the full. He didn't try to squeeze the last drop out of his rights. Now, it's very easy for us, even in a Christian organization, to have that spirit, this is my right, and I'm going to get it, I'll fight for it.

Well, I wonder whether that would be the way in which the Lord would have gone about it. We have certain rights, and if those over us are sensitive, they'll be sensitive to those rights and they'll be seeking to give us those rights. But we're not to squeeze the last drop out of our rights and try to get the very most we can.

It's that which we give that is the important thing rather than that which we receive. One of the important marks of spiritual maturity is that we give far more than we receive, and we enjoy giving more than receiving. Well, have we got that attitude? Am I really a giver? When our Lord was on earth, he was constantly giving himself away.

He said, I didn't come to receive from others, I came to give, what? My life. And he was constantly giving, giving, giving. And this is to be our attitude too.

Now, the first right that he mentions is found in verse 4, the right to gratify normal appetite. Do we not have the right to our food and drink? I think here, probably primarily, he is asserting his right to be supported by the church and to eat and drink at the expense of the church. But the other principle is there too.

We have the right to eat and to drink. These are material benefits to which we have an inherent right. It's God's provision for us.

And Paul said, well, I've got the right to gratify normal appetite the same as anybody else. I don't have to go hungry. And yet he said, I haven't always used that right.

And you remember one of his, I think it was in Philippians, he said, I know what it is to be hungry. I know what it is to be thirsty. He was quite prepared, if the work of the gospel demanded it, to go hungry and not to exercise his right to normal appetite and to gratifying.

And sometimes we may be placed not in our affluent countries, perhaps, but when you're in the mission field, my, you have some very difficult things. I was talking to a missionary in Denver two or three days ago, and I remember he was in an area in Laos where for three months of the year, there was no such thing as a vegetable. You couldn't get it, nothing there.

You imagine life for three months without a fresh vegetable. That wouldn't be very interesting. And yet he could have refused to serve there and gone somewhere else.

But he didn't exercise that right, and he lived in that, those conditions, the right to gratify normal appetite. Because a thing is lawful, that doesn't necessarily mean that we should use it to the full. To Paul, the joy and the obligation of sharing the gospel was so of such paramount importance that food and drink became secondary.

I think that that is the principle behind fasting. I don't think you'll find anywhere in the New Testament where they set out and say, I'm going to have two days fast or I'm going to fast. I think that in every case where they fasted, it was because the spiritual interests were of such paramount importance to them that food became a secondary thing, not important.

You know, it's when spiritual things assume that place in our lives that then we're willing to give up our rights, and if necessary, to fast in that way. Now, the missionary has a right to good food, just as much right to rich food as we have. You won't find any two standards in the New Testament, one standard for Christians at home and one standard for Christians on the mission for you.

It's strange that people at home think it's quite right for missionaries to do without things, and they're quite happy to let them do without. But no, not us, no. But where's the difference? Who said there was a difference? The fact that you go overseas, does that change a principle? No change at all.

And oftentimes missionaries, for the sake of the gospel, are prepared to renounce their rights and live in an area where it is a bare subsistence. If they lived on too high a level, they would cut themselves off from the people, and so they are prepared to give up that right, and God honors them for it, and this fruit comes as a result of it. You know, fruitfulness comes when we allow the cross to come into our lives and to cut into our lives.

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone. It's when we die to the self-life in its manifestations that the fruit begins to come. When John Wesley was a young man, he determined that he wouldn't be bossed by his body.

He found temptations along that line, and so he said, I won't be enslaved by my appetite. You know what he did? He lived on potatoes for two years. Lovely diet.

Potatoes for two years, not even potato chips or french fries. But imagine that. Here's a man of character.

He said he was like Paul. Paul said, I will suffer anything if only the gospel might get out. John Wesley said, I'm prepared to do well at anything if only I can be more effective as a preacher, and how effective he became.

But we're not all willing to do that in the interests of increased soul winning effectiveness. He made Paul's words his own. His inflexible purpose was to be the very best for God, and he was prepared to make any sacrifice to do it.

In India, I suppose it would be at the turn of the century or a little later, there was a young man named Frederick Tucker. He was a very brilliant legal man, and he was made a judge, was very high up in the Indian high court. And I forget the circumstances, but he was converted.

And after his conversion, he began to look inside and wonder, why am I spending all my time settling petty disputes among people for sordid money? Why do I not give my life to bringing people to Christ? And so he resigned his position, even though he probably would have gone on and become the viceroy of India, but he gave it up. And at that time, the Salvation Army was at its height, and there were wonderful revival movements going on in Britain. And as he read about it, he thought, this is the kind of thing I want to get involved in.

So he went to Britain, and he offered himself as a missionary to General Booth. Actually, he married General Booth's daughter, and he became known afterwards as Frederick Booth Tucker. He went back to India again.

Of course, he had the language, so he could go straight into work. And he was endeavoring to win the people, but nothing happened. Nobody turned.

Nobody had any interest. Nobody turned to the Lord. And he was dismayed, and he prayed and sought the Lord what he should do, and then he came to this decision.

He said, I'll dress like one of their holy men. I'll go about just in a cotton garment. I'll take a beggar's bowl, and I'll live on what they give me.

I'll go barefoot. And he got another Salvation Army man to go with him, and the two of them set off to go and work among the people in that area. Well, if they gave them food, they had it.

If they didn't, they didn't. But these men had been used to wearing shoes. Their feet were soft, and they weren't used to going on the blistering Indian roads.

And before very long, their feet were just a mass of blisters, and every step was an agony. They came to one village on this particular day, and the people were entirely hostile. They would give them no food.

They wouldn't give them any water. They just would have nothing to do with them. And so thoroughly discouraged, they threw themselves down under in the shade of a tree, and they were so tired, they went to sleep.

But when they woke up, they found themselves surrounded by the people of the village. And then a spokesman came forward, and he said, we have been very evil people. He said, when you came here, we didn't want you to come.

We didn't want to hear your message. But he said, when you lay down and went to sleep, we thought we'll go and have a look and see what they're like. So we came up close, and we were looking at you, and then we saw your feet, and your feet, a mass of blisters.

And we thought, we've been very evil people. If these men would walk on feet like that to come and bring us a message, then we've been evil the way we have treated them. We will give them food and drink, and then we'll ask to hear the message.

And so they did. And after they'd eaten and drunk, Frederick Tucker preached to them. Do you know what happened? That was the beginning of a movement that brought in 25,000 Christians in that area.

And what was it? Here was a person who surrendered his rights to food, to eat and drink, prepared to go hungry, thirsty. And look how God responded. He surrendered his rights.

Then the right to normal marital life. Verse 5, Paul says, Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Kephas? Haven't I got the right to a normal married life just the same as the other apostles? And yet, he said, I haven't used that right. It's very difficult to say, but I think the evidence would be almost slightly on the side of Paul being married.

You remember he said that when Stephen was stoned, he gave the vote against him. That would imply he was in the Sanhedrin, and you couldn't be in the Sanhedrin unless you were a married person. So it will almost seem as though Paul had been a married man.

The Bible doesn't say so. His wife may have left him when he became a Christian, or she may have died. Anything may have happened.

But at any rate, he says, I've got the right. I've got the same right as anyone else to have a normal married life. He said, nevertheless, I have not made use of that right.

There are many married people who are called into the service of the Lord, and they have the right to a normal married life. And yet, sometimes, in the interests of the gospel, God asks them not to make the full use of that right. I think it's true to say probably that for the last 30 years, I've spent about six months out of 12 in travel, and sometimes accompanied with my wife, very often not.

But here comes the call of God to married people to be prepared to give up their right to a coherent, steady married life with no change and no husband going away and leaving you behind. People do it in business, and yet they're so reluctant to do it in Christian work, as though it were something extraordinary. We've got to be willing to give up that right, voluntarily to release our husband, our wife, if that is necessary in the interests of the gospel.

There are those who say, well, I've got the right to romance. I've got the right to marriage. And so you have.

Everyone has the right to marriage. But there are some who, for the sake of the kingdom, have been prepared to renounce that right for Christ's sake and the gospel's. And I'm quite sure that such who do that for Christ's sake, that sacrifice is not overlooked by a master, and it'll have its reward.

In the realm of romance, Paul had his priorities right. To him, the first thing was doing the will of God in the salvation of souls, and the other thing came second, that I might by all means save some. There was a summary of his philosophy of life.

I'll do anything. I don't mind what it costs. I don't mind what sacrifice it involves.

I'm doing it first for him, and then for those who are out of Christ. Romance is wonderful when it's in the will of God. It's a tragedy when it's out of the will of God.

And some who may be here and you've not married, when you get to heaven, I'm quite sure as you look back, you're going to see a good reason for it. One of our missionaries, when she was old, she was a really, really hard case. She was a very interesting woman.

But she said to me one day, Mr. Sanders, do you know one of the first questions I'm going to ask the Lord when I get to heaven? I knew something would be coming. So I said, no, I haven't any idea. She says, I'm going to ask the Lord, why didn't you give me a husband? She said, I wanted a husband, and I'd have made him a good wife too.

But the Lord didn't give her a husband. Did she go away and sulk? What did she do? That woman who died only a year or so ago, that woman has hundreds upon hundreds of spiritual children. And I'm quite sure that when the Lord tells her why he didn't, she'll be fully satisfied.

The Lord's got his reasons that he doesn't always explain. You remember what our Lord said to his disciples, what I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will know afterwards. As an old man, I look back now and see some of the things that which to me were a total mystery.

I couldn't understand why God allowed it to happen, but I've lived long enough now to see why. And I think we've got to take the Lord on trust. What I'm doing, you may not understand now, but it's all right, you will know afterwards.

Be content, serve me where you are, and I'll explain to you when the day comes. I think for many, this is a central point of surrender. Have you really surrendered that thing to the Lord? Now, I've had a lot to do with single missionaries.

I'm deeply sympathetic to the position of a single girl who would love to be married, and yet the Lord hasn't arranged it that way. I'm deeply sympathetic. But I know this, that those who have faced up to it, and had a final dealing with the Lord on it, get into a place of liberty and joy that makes a tremendous difference.

I remember one of our ladies, she got to the stage where she felt, well, I'm on the shelf. And she'd been expecting and longing, but nothing had happened. And she was going home on furlough this time, and she was just giving her testimony in the family circle, and she said, well, she said, I've faced it.

I'm on the shelf. All right, Lord, I accept it. I'm not going to worry about it anymore.

I accept that, and I'm just going to go and throw myself into His work. And she did. And when she came back to the field again, a young man asked her to marry him.

It doesn't always work out that way. But you see, she dealt with the situation, got into a position where she was victorious over it, and then the Lord stepped in and gave her something that was very precious indeed. It's entirely safe to commit your life in all its aspects to the Lord.

He won't take advantage of you. He loves you too much. He's doing that which He sees will be eternally in your highest interest.

He's too loving to do anything that's unkind, and He's too wise to make a mistake. So you can trust Him. Trust that to Him as everything else.

The Lord never penalizes anyone who sacrifices their rights in the interests of the gospel. Then a third thing. A right to normal rest and recreation.

Verse six. Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Paul chose at times to work for a living rather than accept his support from the church. He says it's perfectly right.

Paid preaching's right. But I didn't use that right. I wanted to be free so that I wouldn't be held under financial responsibility to any group.

It means that I can be absolutely impartial in my dealings with people. But he said I've got the right to take normal rest and recreation, but he said I haven't used that right. Now I'm not speaking against rest and recreation.

The Lord used to take His disciples away for a break. The Jewish festivals were holiday seasons. They were for rest and recreation.

So I'm not speaking about that, but what I'm saying is this, that there are times when my leisure, my rest time, my recreation time needs to be broken into in the interest of the gospel. I'm not to resent it. I'm to be willing to do it.

Furlough time may come. It may need to be postponed because nobody can take my place and I need to be willing to do it. I surrender my right to it.

And I believe that this is a correct attitude. Paul didn't exercise his rights and he is an example to us. Robert Murray McChain was a young Scottish preacher from Dundee under whose ministry there were great revivals.

You'll find *The Life of Robert Murray McChain*. It's been republished just recently again. It's a wonderful book, a very stirring book.

But he died when he was 29. He was delicate in health, but he didn't spare himself and he overdid things. And when he was on his deathbed, a friend was there with him holding his hand and he turned to the friend.

This is what he said. He said, God gave me a horse to ride and a message to deliver. Alas, I've killed the horse and I can't deliver the message.

Now God's given you a horse to ride and a message to deliver. Don't kill the horse. Look after the horse.

Take adequate rest and recreation. Don't burn the candle at both ends, but there will be times when it is right to do that, when it will be a sacrifice, when it will cost you, where you will be tired. And in what better service could we be tired than in the service of God? Why should we be afraid of being tired? Don't kill the horse.

But there's another angle too. There are some horses that need a spur. You'll know what kind of a horse you are.

Sometimes you need to put the spur in so that you'll reach the destination. But be willing to give up leisure or pleasure if it means that someone is going to be blessed. And then the fourth thing, verses 11 and 12, the right to appropriate remuneration.

He said, if we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more? He said, I've got the right to appropriate remuneration for my work. But he said, I haven't used that right. He said, the farmer who produces the crop expects to have some of the crop.

The man who grows grapes expects to drink some of the wine. It's quite right for a Christian to live of the gospel. But in order that I might win more, I have been prepared to do without that.

Now, in your work, I know that you probably could have done far, far better if you had remained in the secular world. You have, to a certain extent, renounced that right. There may still be further renunciations the Lord may ask of you.

You see, it all depends on how you hold things. When the Lord was speaking in Luke chapter 14 to the disciples, he said to them that unless they were prepared to renounce all that they had, they could not be his disciples. That's a terrible absolute, isn't it? All that you have.

The disciples said, we have left all and followed you. Paul said, I suffer the loss of all things. And Jesus said that we are to renounce.

The idea is say goodbye to all things. Have we? You say, well, what do I do? Do I start selling up? I don't think that's what Paul is saying there. It all depends on how you look upon your possessions.

Do you look upon them and say, well, these are mine. This is my right. This money is mine.

This home is mine. This car is mine. This family is mine.

These are mine. That's one way of looking upon it. Another way, these things God has entrusted me to have, made me trustee of for as long as he chooses.

I accept this money, these possessions from him with gratitude. I don't hold them like this and say, this is mine. I'll cling to my rights, but I'll hold them like this with my hand inverted and my fingers lightly touching.

And I'll say, Lord, I thank you for entrusting me with these gifts, these possessions. I'll hold them as your trustee. And if you want any of them back again, you only need to say so and I'll let them go.

You see the difference? Which is your attitude in financial matters? Are you prepared if the Lord wants you to say, yes, Lord, I'll let that go. Or do you say, this is mine? That's involved in discipleship, our Lord said. And you know, you never lose anything by giving the Lord the benefit of the doubt.

Paul never allowed monetary considerations to guide him in his actions, do we? We should be as willing to accept a position where our remuneration will be less as we are to accept a position in which our remuneration will be more. We'll give up our rights. We won't insist upon them.

Monetary considerations must not dictate our actions. Paul said, I've got this right, but I've not used it to the full. Now, what was his motivation? To take stand like that, surely there must be some very strong motives.

And if you do a study of this chapter, as I hope you will, you'll see that there were some motives in verse 18. So as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel, he says, that was one of his motives. In verse 22, that I may by all means save some.

Verse 25, in order that he might share, receive the imperishable crown. In order that he might share in the blessings of the gospel. There are strong positive motives, but then there are strong negative motives too.

Look at verse 12, lest the gospel be hindered. I'll do nothing that will hinder the spread of the gospel. I'll do everything.

I'll suffer anything that will mean that the gospel will get out more freely and more effectively. Verse 15, negative motive, that his boast, the gospel without charge, might not be an empty one. And there's verse 25, that very solemn verse, that lest he himself should be disqualified.

He takes the figure of the race and he said, you know that in a race many run, but only one receives the prize. So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises discipline in all things.

There's another of Paul's absolutes, exercises discipline in all things. Do I exercise discipline in all things? Not in some things, but in every area. Am I a disciplined person? This is not hard, harsh, Calvinistic.

This is just realistic. Is my life a really disciplined life? Do I know a relaxed discipline in all areas in my life? Well, Paul says, I know my own tendency. He said, I don't run aimlessly.

When I'm running, I'm running to win the prize. I've got a goal before me. I'm not just padding along.

I'm straining every nerve to reach the goal. He said, I don't box as one beating the air. When I used to go through Bangkok sometimes, we generally had to get up very early in the morning to get away to get transport.

And oftentimes when it was still dark, you'd go through the streets and then you'd see fellows shadow boxing all over the place, but they never hit anyone. They just beat the air. And Paul says, I'm not like that.

This is when I'm fighting every blow lands. I don't fight aimlessly. I aim and I strike it.

I hit it every time. He said, I pummel my body. I beat it black and blue.

I discipline it. I bring it under control. I subdue it.

Lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified. Well, he's not thinking he's going to lose his salvation. He knows he's got that, but he is speaking about the reward for service.

He said, I don't want to miss that. This one thing I do, I press on for the prize. And he said, I realize that through my body, there may come to me temptations to which if I succumb, it will result in my being disqualified in the race.

My brothers and sisters, we are still in the body. The flesh is not dead because we're in a Christian community. We are not granted immunity from the temptations of others.

And here is a word of solemn word from Paul, a word of warning. He said, I, I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air, but I pummel my body and subdue it.

Lest after preaching to others, I myself might be disqualified. So my dear friends, may we know the joy because it's not all sacrifice. May we know the joy of giving up for Christ's sake, for the gospel sake, some of our rights in the gospel in order that by all means, we might save some.

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