



**Revel**

Bernard Revel Graduate School  
of Jewish Studies

# Year in Review

2020–2021



It was a great honor and deeply humbling to succeed Dean David Berger in July 2020 and take the reins as the Dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies.

When I signed on to do so in late February 2020, I was not expecting to spend much of my first year sat in a home office becoming an amateur epidemiologist. Yet, despite the challenges this presented, thanks to Revel's indefatigable faculty, staff, and students, we continued to progress on all fronts.

Necessity, it is often said, is the mother of invention, and the enforced move to remote platforms that we all experienced this year enabled Revel to engage new audiences both nationally and internationally. This past academic year, our student numbers increased by almost 40%, our internationally renowned faculty continued to produce outstanding scholarship, and we were able to put on events that reached audiences the size of which Revel has never seen before.

This "Year in Review" newsletter highlights some of the best of this past year for you, emphasizing Revel's continued commitment to superior academic achievement and communal engagement.

As we move into the academic year 2021–22, we hope to be able to share more exciting developments with you as Revel continues to build for the future.

With all best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Rynhold".

**Daniel Rynhold, PhD**

*Dean, Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies*





It is my pleasure to share some highlights of a very successful academic year at the BRGS PhD program. Despite the hardships that Covid created, our PhD students enjoyed an intellectually stimulating year with significant accomplishments. In the opening event of the fall 2020 semester, advanced PhD students presented summaries of their dissertation research to their peers. Over the course of the academic year, we had a number of Zoom gatherings where PhD students interacted with leading scholars in a range of fields, including Dr. Susan Weissman, Dr. Jordan Finken, Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli, and Dr. Lawrence Schiffman.

I am honored to recount the accomplishments of our students. Several articles published by our students are listed later in this publication. BRGS is especially proud of our two most recent PhD graduates who both successfully defended their first-rate dissertations. Dr. Asher Oser's dissertation, "When

an American Jew Produced: Judah David Eisenstein and the First Hebrew Encyclopedia," tells the story of the publication of the first modern Hebrew encyclopedia, *Ozar Yisrael*, by Judah David Eisenstein, an amateur scholar and entrepreneurial immigrant to New York City. Dr. Jeong Mun. Heo's dissertation, "Images of Torah From the Second Temple Period Through the Middle Ages," tracks the ramifications of the development of conceptions of Torah across a long historical period. We wish Drs. Oser and Heo great success in their future academic endeavors. We are looking forward to building on this year's successes in the year to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan V. Dauber". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Jonathan V. Dauber, PhD**  
*Associate Professor of Jewish Mysticism*  
*Director of the PhD Program*





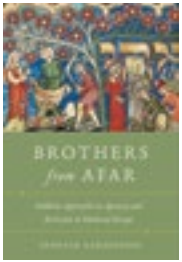
# Events

**JULY 3, 2020**

*How Will We Remember Covid? A View from the Archives*  
Presented by Shulamith Berger and Prof. Steven Fine

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**FEB 10, 2021**



*On the Margins of Medieval Jewish Society in Halakhah and History: the Ger Toshav and the Apostate*

Presented by President Ari Berman and Prof. Ephraim Kanarfogel celebrating the publication of Prof. Kanarfogel's new book, *Brothers from Afar: Rabbinic Approaches to Apostasy and Reversion in Medieval Europe*

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**FEB 16, 2021**

*Shabbetai Zvi and the Most Successful Messianic Movement in Jewish History after the First Century*  
Presented by Prof. David Berger  
Sponsored by a Revel supporter and hosted by Young Israel of Great Neck

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**MARCH 17 2021**

*Crisis and Hope: Ambassador Dan Shapiro and Rabbi Yosef Blau in Conversation*  
Presented by Prof. Jess Olson

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**APRIL 20 2021**

*Book Launch Contextualizing Jewish Temples*  
Presented by Prof. Shalom Holtz in celebration of the publication of his new book, *Contextualizing Jewish Temples*

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**APRIL 27, 2021**

*Antisemitism, White Nationalism and Racism in America Today*  
Presented by Eric Ward and Prof. Jess Olson

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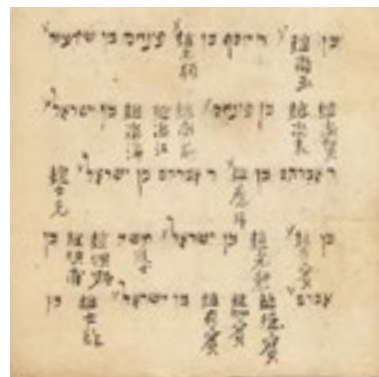
**MAY 5, 2021**

*Magafah: Pandemics throughout Jewish History*  
Presented by Prof Richard Hidary, Prof. Ronnie Perelis, and Prof. Jess Olson  
Sponsored by a Revel supporter and hosted by DAT Minyan

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## Chinese-Jewish Conversation

The Chinese-Jewish Conversation held its last in-person event on March 3, 2020 on Biblical and Chinese Ecological Values. The next day, YU shut down due to Covid. During the academic year 2021/22, the CJC migrated to an online platform, both in English and Chinese. The newly designed CJC website includes a rich video library that presents aspects of the Chinese and Jewish traditions comparatively. The newly created CJC Chinese blog presents essays on Jewish beliefs and customs, festivals, ancient and modern history, and



*Names in Hebrew and Chinese from a Kaifeng Jewish prayer book. Courtesy of the Klau Library in Cincinnati.*

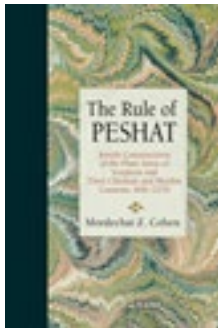
world-famous personalities. Through the CJC WeChat account, the blog is publicized widely on Chinese social media, answering questions that many Chinese people have about Jews, Judaism, and Jewish culture and history.

# Publications

## DAVID BERGER

**BOOK CHAPTERS** “Scholarship and the blood libel: Past and present.” In: A. Lange, K. Mayerhofer, D. Porat, & L.H. Schiffman (eds.), *Confronting anti-semitism in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism* (pp. 71-85). De Gruyter. (2020). “The problem of exile in medieval Jewish-Christian Polemic. In: Y. Berger & C. Milikowski (eds.), *In the dwelling of a sage lie precious treasures: Essays in Jewish studies in honor of Shnayer Z. Leiman* (pp. 189-204). KTAV Publishing House. (2020). “Metamorphoses of the concept ‘antisemitism’: A response to David Engel’s article.” In: S. Ury & G. Miron (eds.), *Antisemitism: Historical concept, public discourse* (pp. 363-373). Zion: A Quarterly for Research in Jewish History.

## MORDECHAI Z. COHEN



**BOOK** *The Rule of Peshat: Jewish constructions of the plain sense of scripture and their Christian and Muslim contexts, 900-1270.* University of Pennsylvania Press.

## STEVEN FINE

**EDITOR** Miller, S., Swartz, M., Fine, S., Grunhaus, N., & Jassen, A. (eds.). (2020). *Scrolls to traditions: A Festschrift honoring Lawrence H. Schiffman.* Brill.

**BOOK CHAPTER** (2020). “The treason of Yosa Meshita (Genesis Rabba 65:27): A rabbinic reflection on the fate of the Temple Lampstand.” In: S. Fine, N. Grunhaus, A. Jassen, S. Miller, & M. Swartz (eds.), *Scrolls to traditions: A Festschrift honoring Lawrence H. Schiffman*, (pp. 254-275). Brill.

**JOURNAL ARTICLE** (2020). Review of Abraham Tal, ed., *Tibât Mârqe: The ark of Marqe: Edition, translation, commentary.* In: *Review of Biblical Literature Online.* (2020). Review of Ross Shepard Kraemer: *The Mediterranean diaspora in late antiquity what Christianity cost the Jews.* In: *Review of Biblical Literature Online.*

## NAOMI GRUNHAUS



**EDITOR** Miller, S., Swartz, M., Fine, S., Grunhaus, N., & Jassen, A. (eds.). (2020). *From Scrolls to traditions: A Festschrift honoring Lawrence H. Schiffman.* Brill.

## JEFFREY S. GUROCK

**BOOK CHAPTER** (2020). “The dilemmas of immigrant ‘tweeners’: An exploration of age and Americanization.” In: Y. Berger & C. Milikowsky (eds.), *In the dwelling of a sage lie precious treasures: Essays in Jewish studies in honor of Shnayer Z. Leiman*, (pp. 281-296). KTAV Publishing House. (2021). Jewish geography in New York neighborhoods. In: D. Soyer (ed.), *The Jewish metropolis: New York from the 17th to the 21st century*, (pp. 205-228). Academic Studies Press.

**ONLINE WORK** (2020). “In memoriam: Moses Rischin.” *Perspectives of History. Historians.*

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## RICHARD HIDARY

**BOOK CHAPTER** (2021). “A Tale of Two or Three Witnesses: Oral Testimony in Greco-Roman, Qumranic and Rabbinic Court Procedure.” In: Miller, S., Swartz, M., Fine, S., Grunhaus, N., & Jassen, A. (eds.), *Festschrift in Honor of Lawrence Schiffman* (pp. 296-324). Brill.

**JOURNAL ARTICLE** “Why Are there Lawyers in Heaven?: Rabbinic Aggadot on the Divine Courtroom” In: *Mehkerei Yerushalaim be-Sifrut Ivrit* 31 (2020), 65-90. “Talmud as Rhetorical Exercise: Progymnasmata and Controversiae in Rabbinic Literature” In: *Mada'e Ha-Yahadut* (2021), 81-113.

**ONLINE WORK** (2021). “Love, loathing, and the law of return.” *Tabletmag.*

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## SHALOM HOLTZ



**EDITOR** Ganzel, T. & Holtz, S.E. (eds). (2020). *Contextualizing Jewish temples*. The Brill Reference Library of Judaism. Brill.

**BOOK CHAPTER** "Festschrift: Preliminary Observations on Trial Procedure in the AI-Yahudu Texts" In: Koller, A., Cohen, M., & Moshavi, A. (eds.), *Semitic, Biblical and Jewish Studies in Honor of Richard C. Steiner* (pp 27\*-37\*). Bialik Institute and Yeshiva University Press.

Yeshiva University Press.

**JOURNAL ARTICLE** "Review of David A. Bosworth, House of Weeping: The Motif of Tears in Akkadian and Hebrew Prayers (2018)" In: *The Journal of Religion* 100 (2020), 270–271.

## EPHRAIM KANARFOGEL

**BOOK** (2020). *Brothers from afar: Rabbinic approaches to apostasy and reversion in Medieval Europe*. Wayne State University Press.

**BOOK CHAPTERS** (2020). "Understanding the trajectory of medieval Jewish studies." In: D. Sorkin (ed.), *A commitment to scholarship* (pp. 119-32). American Academy for Jewish Research. (2020). "Gishot la-nevu'ah be-Zefon Zarefat ve-Ashkenaz bimei ha-Benayim." In: A. Koller, M.Z. Cohen, & A. Moshavi (eds.), *Biblical, semitic, and Jewish studies in honor of Richard C. Steiner* (pp. 158-75). Mosad Bialik and YU Press. (2020). "Prognostication in medieval Jewish law and legal thought." In: M. Heiduk, K. Herbers, & H.C. Lehner (eds.), *Prognostication in the medieval world: A handbook* (vol. 2, pp. 944-47). De Gruyter. (2020). "Assessing the (non-) reception of Mishneh Torah in medieval Ashkenaz." In: Y. Berger & C. Milikowsky (eds.), *Essays in Jewish studies in honor of Shnayer Z. Leiman* (pp. 123-45). Ktav. (2021). "Ta'amei ha-Mizvot in Medieval Ashkenaz." In: J. Brown and M. Herman (eds.), *Accounting for the Commandments in Medieval Judaism: Studies in Law, Philosophy, Pietism and Kabbalah* (pp. 177-90). Brill. (2021). "The Role of the Tosafists in Jewish-Christian Polemics" In: C. Cluse and J. R. Muller (eds.), *Medieval Ashkenaz: Studies in Honor of Alfred Haverkamp*, (pp. 241-53). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. (2020). "Understanding the Trajectory of Medieval Jewish Studies." In D. Sorkin (ed.), *The American Academy for Jewish Research Centenary Volume* (pp. 119-32.) American Academy for Jewish Research. (2020). "Gishot la-Nevu'ah be-Parshanut Zefon Zarefat ve-Ashkenaz Bimei ha-Benayim." In: A. Koller, M. Cohen, & A. Moshavi (eds.), *Mehqarim be-Safot Shemiyot, Miqra, u-Madda'ei ha-Yahadut*, (pp. 158-75). Bialik Institute and Yeshiva University Press.

## AARON KOLLER



**BOOK** (2020). *Unbinding Isaac: The significance of the Akedah for modern Jewish thought*. University of Nebraska Press, The Jewish Publication Society.

**EDITOR** Koller, A., Cohen, M., & Moshavi, A. (eds.) (2020). *Semitic, Biblical, and Jewish studies: Festschrift for Richard Steiner*. Bialik Institute and Yeshiva University Press.

**BOOK CHAPTERS** (2020). "Hebrew and Aramaic in contact." In: R. Hasselbach-Andee (ed.), *A companion to Ancient Near Eastern languages* (pp. 439-455). Blackwell. (2020). "Richard Steiner: An appreciation." In: A. Koller, M. Cohen, & A. Moshavi (eds.), *Semitic, biblical, and Jewish studies: Festschrift for Richard Steiner* (pp. 7-14). Bialik and Yeshiva University Press. (2020). "Thrones and crowns: On the regalia of the West Semitic Monarchy." In: L. Naeh & D. Brostowsky (eds.), *The throne in art and archaeology from the dawn of the Ancient Near East until the Late Medieval Period* (pp. 123-134). Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. (2020). "Tree and wood, polysemy and vagueness: Detangling the branches of the Hebrew word עץ." In: A. Koller, M. Cohen, & A. Moshavi (eds.), *Semitic, biblical, and Jewish studies: Festschrift for Richard Steiner* (pp. 164-181). Bialik Institute and Yeshiva University Press.

**JOURNAL ARTICLES** "Review of James A. Diamond, Jewish Theology Unbound." In: *AJS Review* 44 (2020), 411-413. "Review of Yosef Ofer, The Masora on scripture and its methods." In: *Lešonénu* 82 (2020), 432-436.

## ARI MERMELSTEIN



**BOOK** *Power and Emotion in Ancient Judaism: Community and Identity in Formation*, Cambridge University Press.

## DANIEL RYNHOLD

**BOOK CHAPTERS** (2020). "Maimonides's theology." In: S. Kepnes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology* (pp.105-31). Cambridge University Press. (2021). "The nature of good and evil." In: Dan Frank and Aaron Segal (eds.), *Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed: A Critical Guide* (pp.60-77). Cambridge University Press.

**JOURNAL ARTICLE** Response to Kepnes: Theology and Aesthetics." In: *Journal of Textual Reasoning* Volume 12:1 (2021).

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## Of Note

**Prof. Joshua Karlip** was awarded a generous book grant from SEFER, an institute of Jewish history in Moscow, for research on his book project, *Rabbis in the Land of Atheism: The Struggle to Save Judaism in the Soviet Union*.

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**Prof. Ronnie Perelis** hosted a conference, *Translating Americas*, sponsored by the American Academy for Jewish Research.

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**Rabbi Tzvi Sinensky**, a PhD student, wrote an article in the forthcoming edition of *Tradition*.

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**Rabbi Yaakov Taubes**, a PhD student, published an article, "A Fresh Approach to Nahmanides and Aggadah at Barcelona" In: *Jewish Quarterly Review* 110 (2010), 769-701.

**Binyamin Goldstein**, a PhD student, published an article, "Encountering the Grotesque." In: (Anna Krauß, Jonas Leipziger and Friederike Schücking-Jungblut, eds.) *Material Aspects of Reading in Ancient and Medieval Cultures* (pp 233-250). De Gruyter.



**Miriam Zami**, a PhD student published an article, "Yefet, Shem, and the New Dead Sea Scrolls" in the *Tradition* journal.

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**Dean Prof. Daniel Rynhold** participated in this podcast : *The Philosophical Legacy of Jonathan Sacks* and a panel discussion with the London School of Jewish Studies on *The Life Changing Ideas of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Z"l*.

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Recent Revel PhD graduate, **Rabbi Dr. Yosie Levine**, wrote this important article about Covid vaccines.

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## RECENT GRADUATES



**Jeong Mun Heo** recently completed his PhD. His dissertation is titled, "Images of Torah from the Second Temple Period Through the Middle Ages". He also holds a B.c in Mathematics and Computer Sciences from Kosin University and a MDiv from Korea Theological Seminary in his native South Korea, and a MA

in Jewish Education from the Hebrew University Jerusalem, as well as a ThM in Biblical Studies from Boston College. He hopes to continue research in the area of phenomenology of religion, and the philosophical and theological discourse between Judaism and Christianity. He would like to establish an academic center for Jewish Studies and Jewish-Christian Dialogue in South Korea, which would contribute to not only promoting a mutual and positive understanding of their ancient roots that preserve academic, religious, and cultural Jewish-Christian heritages but also broadening the understanding of the interreligious dialogues between Jewish-Christian faiths, as well as other religious faiths.

*"Looking back at great memories of my time at YU, I can say that it was the most fortunate, blessed, and rewarding experience in my academic life."*

*"I was particularly privileged to have had the opportunity to meet and learn from Revel's faculty. I enjoyed the classes which were taught by the excellent professors who have contributed to my experience and intellectual development—enriching and empowering my knowledge and understanding of a broad range of academic areas...[O]ne of the major highlights of my experience during the first year at YU—how, in an individual tutorial with my supervisor, Dr. Jonathan V. Dauber, I enjoyed reading the Hebrew original texts of the Nefesh HaChaim, written by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, who discusses the idea of Torah lishmah, Torah for Torah's Sake."*

*"My experiences and studies at YU provided me with immense joy of learning. I was empowered by the spirit of integrating faith and scholarship..."*



**Asher Oser** recently completed his Phd. His dissertation is titled “When an American Jew Produced: Judah David Eisenstein and the First Hebrew Encyclopedia,” and tells the story of the publication of first modern Hebrew encyclopedia, *Ozar Yisrael*, by Judah David Eisenstein, an amateur scholar and entrepreneurial immigrant to New York City.



**Aron White** is originally from the UK, and has a BSc in Politics and International Relations from the University of London. After studying at Yeshivat Hakotel, he began his Semikha studies at RIETS Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, which he completed in 2020. During his Semikha studies,

he also earned a certificate in Mental Health Counselling through the RIETS/Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, as well as an MA in Jewish History through the Bernard Revel Graduate School. Aron made Aliya with his family in October 2020, and now works as the Torah Projects Coordinator for Mizrahi USA/RZA.

*“I feel that my time in Revel has made me a better Jew, and enabled me to be a better Rabbi and teacher. Through the range of courses I was enabled to study, all taught by genuinely world leading professors, I felt I both deepened and broadened my understanding of Jewish history, heritage and learning. By combining the best of academic scholarship with an institution that celebrates a commitment to Jewish life, Revel has given me something invaluable that I will take with me for the rest of my life.”*

**Denise Zami** currently teaches Tanakh to 9th and 11th grades at SAR High School in Riverdale. She just completed her MA in Bible Studies at Revel. Denise also received her BA in Jewish Education from Stern College for Women Yeshiva University, where she was a Legacy Heritage Scholar. Denise previously taught Jewish Studies at Gann Academy, an innovative pluralistic high school in the Boston area. Denise lives in Manhattan with her husband Jason and new baby girl, Regina.

**Rebecca Zami** completed her MA in Ancient Jewish History. Currently, Rebecca is the Leon Charney Research Associate at the YU Center for Israel Studies working on the upcoming exhibit, Samaritans: A Biblical People. Rebecca has a particular interest in Biblical archaeology and has participated in archaeological excavations in Israel and hopes to pursue a degree in archaeology following her graduation from Revel.

## INCOMING PHD STUDENTS



**Mendel Breitstein** holds a BA in English literature from the University of Maryland and an MA in Medieval Jewish history from BRGS. He is a teacher at Yeshivat Bne Akiva Netivot Haim in Pisgat Zev and also teaches in Israeli colleges. He is pursuing a doctorate in Jewish philosophy.



**Avishag Damari** has a joint BEd in Judaic Studies and Educational technology from Michlala Jerusalem College, and an MA in Leadership and Educational System Management from Bar-Ilan University. After teaching Middle School Judaic Studies and Media Communications for several years in Israel,

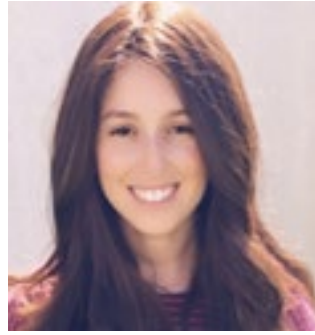
Avishag came to New York as a Shlichah for the World Zionist Organization whereby she taught Hebrew Language, Israeli Culture, and Zionism, at both Barkai Yeshiva in Brooklyn, and SAR Academy in Riverdale. Avishag received an MA in Jewish philosophy at the Bernard Revel Graduate School, where she is now engaged in PhD studies in the same discipline.



**Roy Feldman** holds a BA in History and Linguistics from Columbia University, an MA in Jewish Philosophy from BRGS, and Rabbinic Ordination from RIETS. He is currently Associate Rabbi at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun. Roy is pursuing a doctorate in Jewish History and has a particular interest in American Jewish History.



**Elisha Fine** is a doctoral student in Jewish History of the modern period at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies of Yeshiva University. Having recently completed his MSW at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, his work focuses on the cultural history of death and dying.



**Annie Nagel** holds a BA in Biology from Stern College and a JD from UCLA School of Law. Annie practiced law in Los Angeles for several years and currently teaches Tanach at YULA Girls High School. She is pursuing a doctorate in Bible and has a particular interest in the biblical commentaries of Ramban.



**Noam Kornsgold** holds a BA in History from Columbia University and a BA in Talmud and Rabbinics from JTS. He also earned a MA in Talmud and Rabbinic and rabbinic ordination from JTS. Noam currently serves as the Director of Education and Programming at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires.

He is pursuing a doctorate in medieval Jewish history with a particular interest in the development of halakhah in medieval Ashkenaz.



**David Selis** is the Leon Charney Doctoral Fellow at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies of Yeshiva University, and a research fellow of the YU Center for Israel Studies. His particular interests are the history of the Hebrew book and Modern Jewish cultural history.





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