



South Rondonia Conference headquarters.

Photo courtesy of South Rondonia Conference Archives.

## South Rondonia Conference

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The South Rondônia Conference is an administrative unit of the Seventh-day Adventist Church operating in the territory of the Northwest Brazil Union Mission. Its headquarters is located on Ji-Paraná Ave., no. 855, 76900-285, in the Urupá neighborhood in the city of Ji-Paraná, which is in the state of Rondônia, Brazil.

The South Rondônia Conference (Associação Sul de Rondônia or ASuR) covers 34 municipalities in the southern region of the state of Rondônia. They are: Alta Floresta, Alto Alegre dos Parecis, Alvorada D'Oeste, Cabixi, Cacoal, Castanheiras, Cerejeiras, Chupinguaia, Colorado do Oeste, Corumbiara, Costa Marques, Espigão D'Oeste, Ji-Paraná, Ministro Andreazza, Mirante da Serra, Nova Brasilândia, Nova União, Novo Horizonte do Oeste, Ouro Preto do Oeste, Parecis, Pimenta Bueno, Pimenteiras do Oeste, Presidente Médici, Primavera de Rondônia, Rolim de Moura, Santa Luzia do Oeste, São Felipe D'Oeste, São Francisco do Guaporé, São Miguel do Guaporé, Seringueiras, Teixeirópolis, Urupá, Vale do Paraíso, and Vilhena. There is also the municipality of Rondolândia in

the state of Mato Grosso. All of these municipalities have a total of about 710,940 inhabitants in 30 pastoral districts with 143 congregations and 19,703 Adventist members. In the region, the average is one Adventist per 36 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

In this vast mission field, five school units are in operation: Ji-Paraná Adventist Academy, with 600 students, in the municipality of Ji-Paraná; Ji-Paraná Adventist School, with 292 students, also in Ji-Paraná;<sup>2</sup> Ouro Preto Adventist School, with 130 students, in Ouro Preto do Oeste; Vilhena Adventist School, with 159 students, in Vilhena; and the Western Amazon Adventist Academy (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária or IAAMO), with 271 students, in Mirante da Serra. In total, these educational institutions serve 1,452 students.<sup>3</sup>

In order for the activities to be carried out successfully, ASuR has 149 staff members of which 103 are employees and 46 are workers. Of the latter, 31 are accredited, and 10 are licensed.<sup>4</sup>

## Origin of Adventist Work in the Conference Territory

In 1965, Joaquim Nunes left the city of Icaráima in the state of Paraná to live in Vila de Rondônia (the region currently known as the municipality of Ji-Paraná). Brother Guilherme was also with him. As far as it is known, the first Adventist worship service in that region happened in 1966 and was conducted by Brothers Guilherme and Joaquim Nunes in a local rice deposit. Subsequent meetings were held at Brother Joaquim's residence on a ranch covered by boards. Thus, the Adventist Brothers continued to congregate. Two years later, several new members arrived in that group, including the families of Brothers Antônio Domingos, João Vassalo, Natanael José da Silva, and Tionesto Aminadabe.<sup>5</sup>

As the number of members was constantly growing and a larger meeting space was needed, land was acquired to build an Adventist temple in that location. At that time, the missionary method used was to go through the streets with posters made of cardboard presenting the love of Christ. These actions brought results that could be clearly noticed in the following year (1968) when three people were baptized as fruits of the evangelistic work carried out in Vila de Rondônia. The new converts were: Lauro Chaves, Germana Ruiz, and Aldenora Chaves.<sup>6</sup>

Over the years, other Adventist Brothers arrived from many places in Brazil. The reception of these Brothers was one of the reasons that favored the change of status of that group to an organized church. The change took place on August 11, 1973, in a ceremony attended by representatives of the North Brazil Union (União Norte Brasileira or UNB) and the Central Amazonas Mission (presently the Central Amazonas Conference).<sup>7</sup> Later, with the growth in the number of members, the church at Vila de Rondônia came to be known as the Central Church of Ji-Paraná.

A year later, the government of the Federal Territory of Rondônia donated Cr\$ 40,000.00 (approximately US\$ 5,380.00) to build and finish an Adventist school that already served about 132 students. This assistance made it possible to continue the educational work carried out by the Church, which had recently begun.<sup>8</sup> The missionary

work carried out by this school marked the beginning of evangelism through Adventist education in the municipality of Ji-Paraná and in the neighboring cities.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, other cities in the region were reached by the Adventist message as it had happened in the city of Vilhena. In 1976, there was already a beautiful chapel in the city's central region that had been built by the Adventists there. That same year, a quick series of evangelistic conferences was held in the new building.<sup>10</sup> Little by little, the Adventist Church grew and, from 1979, the south region of Rondônia started to be assisted by the West Amazon Mission (Misión Amazônia Ocidental or MAO, presently the West Amazon Conference), which is based in Porto Velho.<sup>11</sup>

The Western Amazon Mission took important steps in its first biennium of activities. In 1981, the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária or INCRA) donated a 2,000-hectare plot of land to the Mission for the construction of an Adventist boarding school in the rural area of the municipality of Mirante da Serra. Later, the Western Amazon Adventist Academy was founded there.<sup>12</sup> In parallel to the work of IAAMO, Adventist Education made progress, and in 1988, the Adventist Educational Center in Ji-Paraná already offered a complete elementary education program. In the same year, in the city of Cacoal, the cornerstone of the Adventist Educational Center was laid, and in Vilhena, land had already been acquired by the West Amazon Mission to construct a school.<sup>13</sup>

As the Adventist work progressed in the region, new cities continued to be reached by the Gospel message. Within September and November 1989, a series of conferences was held in the city of Rolim de Moura that involved six churches in the region. The theme of the studies presented during the campaign focused on the book of Revelation. As a result of the work, almost 450 people were baptized. In fact, the positive impact of that evangelistic initiative was so great that a regional Catholic church even closed its doors so that their members could attend the evangelistic series.<sup>14</sup>

With the progress of the work in the state, on December 4, 1990, the West Amazon Mission had its status changed to the West Amazon Conference (Associação Amazônia Ocidental or AAmO). This was the first administrative unit of the Church with the status of Conference in the mission field of the North Brazil Union.<sup>15</sup> Also in the 1990s, the SDA Church in the southern region of Rondônia started to give more emphasis to the Global Mission,<sup>16</sup> reaching new cities, as happened with Costa Marques, on the border with Bolivia. Costa Marques was part of the coverage area of the pastoral district of Presidente Médici and, in 1991, was the focus of a great evangelistic effort. Through successful evangelism, 80 people were baptized and another 50 decided to prepare for the next baptismal ceremony. An Adventist congregation was formed in the city as a result.<sup>17</sup>

In 1993, an Adventist school started operating in the city of Espigão do Oeste. Although it ended its activities a few years later, this school fulfilled a great evangelistic role during its operation. Under the influence of the school, three teachers and some family members were baptized.<sup>18</sup> In 1995, the Adventist message also reached

the city of Cabixi. In this city, which is located on the border with Bolivia, for 33 nights a series of conferences was held in a temple built by Adventists. For that occasion, about 300 Bibles were purchased in addition to copies of the books *The Great Controversy* and *Sunlight Project*. Despite strong opposition from the city priest, about 150 people (including former leaders of other denominations) were baptized.<sup>19</sup>

## Organizational History of the Conference

The expansion of the Adventist message in the states of Rondônia and Acre brought great success to the West Amazon Conference. In early 2005, the region had a total of 207 organized churches and 63,995 Adventist members compared to a population of 2,032,503 people in both states. Observing this growth, through the vote no. 2005-15, the North Brazil Union requested the South American Division carry out a study (survey) to reorganize the field. Also in 2005, the South American Division analyzed the data reported by the survey commission and approved the creation of the new field with the construction of a new administrative headquarters in the city of Ji-Paraná in Rondônia.<sup>20</sup>

According to the 2005-24 vote of the South American Division and the corresponding vote of the North Brazil Union, the Denominational General Assembly of Installation and Organization of the South Rondonia Conference of the SDA was held on November 11, 2007, in the temple of the Central Adventist Church of Ji-Paraná. Thus, the ASuR was created and started operating in January of the following year.<sup>21</sup> On that occasion, the first leaders of the new Conference were elected: Leonino Barbosa Santiago as president; Nelson Suci as secretary; and Dario Daniel dos Reis as treasurer.<sup>22</sup>

On the same day of the Organization Assembly, the ASuR headquarters was inaugurated in a building located on Ji-Paraná Ave., no. 855, in the Urupá neighborhood in Ji-Paraná. Since its inauguration, the headquarters has operated at the same address. Among the many present at the inauguration ceremony were representatives of the North Brazil Union and the South American Division as well as political leaders from the region.<sup>23</sup> The creation of ASuR arose from the need to meet the needs of the growing number of members and churches in the region of the state of Rondônia. When founded, this administrative unit was responsible for managing the Adventist Church's advancement in the state's southern region and in the municipality of Rondolândia in the extreme north of Mato Grosso. Its activities began with 19 pastors who served a total of 16,669 Adventists spread out over 170 congregations.<sup>24</sup>

The South Rondônia Conference started its activities under the motto "Living the Hope." Since its foundation, the ASuR leadership has sought to mobilize all departments and churches towards a joint objective - evangelization. Some of the methods used to involve the faithful in missionary work were educational courses, training for lay people, and missionary projects for collaborators and members.<sup>25</sup> In March 2008, two months after starting its activities, the field carried out its first pastoral ordination.<sup>26</sup>

An evangelistic program that enjoyed great support was the “Caleb Mission Project.”<sup>27</sup> In 2009, about 80 young people from the Conference spent about 20 to 30 days of their vacation in missionary work. After undergoing training and receiving a Bible kit, Bible studies, and T-shirts, they left for the mission field to carry out community projects, home visits, and Bible studies. As a result of the work, about 22 people were baptized. After this remarkable experience, the number of young participants, and consequently their activities, gradually increased.<sup>28</sup>

In this mission field, significant work has also been carried out by reaching children and adolescents through the Pathfinders<sup>29</sup> and Adventurers clubs.<sup>30</sup> Between June 26 and 28, 2009, the I Adventurer Family Camp<sup>31</sup> of the South Rondonia Conference was conducted. With the title “Estrelinhas Eternas” [“Eternal Little Stars”], this remarkable event attracted around 400 children between six and nine years of age. The great mobilization on the part of the Adventurers had a strong impact on the city that received them.<sup>32</sup> Currently, the number of Adventurers in ASuR is 1,323, divided into 56 Clubs. The number of Pathfinders is 2,643 participants distributed in 88 Clubs.<sup>33</sup> Spring Baptism<sup>34</sup> is also one of the missionary projects aimed at this age group. Every year, several teenagers are baptized through this evangelistic program.<sup>35</sup>

In 2010, the Adventist Church in Northern Brazil underwent a reorganization. Until the beginning of that year, the North Brazil Union managed the Adventist work in seven Brazilian states, serving more than 350,000 Adventists in that mission field.<sup>36</sup> Due to the expansion of Adventism and the difficulties of displacement between the states, a new administrative unit was created: the Northwest Brazil Union (União Noroeste Brasileira or UNoB), which was based in Manaus, the capital of Amazonas. The Northwest Brazil Union started operating in 2010, serving more than 115,000 Adventists. After this reorganization, ASuR started to be assisted by the new Union.<sup>37</sup>

In this new scenario, missionary projects continued. Other initiatives such as “Breaking the Silence”<sup>38</sup> and “Hope Impact”<sup>39</sup> were implemented. During certain times of the year, Adventists had the opportunity to establish direct contact with people on the streets through activities that involved all departments. In 2016, approximately 230 thousand copies of the book “Esperança Viva” [“Live Hope”] were distributed throughout the state.<sup>40</sup> Later, on August 24, 2019, a large march in Ji-Paraná promoted by the project “Breaking the Silence,” dealing with sexual abuse, was led mainly by Adventurers, Pathfinders, students from the Adventist Education Network, and motorcyclists from the Adventist Motorcycle Ministry.<sup>41</sup>

ASuR youth also are investing a large part of their time to voluntary social assistance work. In November 2019, about 60 volunteers participated in a solidarity action that offered medical, dental, and psychological assistance to the indigenous people of the Suruí ethnic group who live in a village near the city of Cacoal. In total, 80 residents, including the elderly, adults, and children, were assisted by the volunteers. About 115 visits were made offering all types of health care.<sup>42</sup>

In December 2019, the first Espaço Novo Tempo [Hope Center of Influence] of the ASuR mission field was inaugurated, with the objective of serving more directly, through Bible studies, the students and viewers who follow Hope Channel Brazil. Since then, the event has been operating next to the ASuR headquarters in the city of Ji-Paraná. The leadership of the field hopes that, in the coming years, more cities that integrate the territory of the Conference can count on a Espaço Novo Tempo [Hope Center of influences] to serve as a means for preaching the Gospel.<sup>43</sup>

Analyzing ASuR missionary trajectory, it is possible to see that, although there has been progress in relation to the number of established congregations (62 new churches), there has been no proportional growth in terms of the number of members. The challenge, therefore, is to grow sustainably and, for that to happen, the administration of South Rondônia Conference plans to strengthen internal evangelism through strategies for the conservation of baptized members.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding the actions for the future of ASuR, the leadership team realizes the importance of IAAMO achieving its financial self-support and establishing an Adventist school in Cacoal (the second largest city in the region being covered). There are also plans to create a preventive health center in the area. As for churches, the focus is to increase the number of districts; appoint pastors who can exclusively serve the larger congregations; increase the number of churches also serving the districts of small villages where there is still no Adventist presence; and strengthen pastoral care in the four main cities in the region: Ji-Paraná, Cacoal, Vilhena, and Rolim de Moura, where around 50% of the population of ASuR mission field is concentrated.<sup>45</sup> And so the institution will continue to fulfill its evangelical mission.

## Chronology of Administrative Officers<sup>46</sup>

Presidents: Leonino Barbosa Santiago (2008-2009); João Alves Peixoto (2009-present).

Secretaries: Nelson Suci (2008-2009); Sérgio Alan Alves Caxeta (2010-2011); Edmar de Deus Santana (2011); Fernando Campanha Rios (2011-2014); Marcelo Nunes Miranda (2014-2018); Guilherme Sérgio Pessoa Chateaubriand (2019-present).

Treasurers: Dario Daniel dos Reis (2008-2010); Ilton César Hubner (2010-2013); João Carlos Fonseca Pedreira (2014-2016); Nelson Valdir Pinto (2016-present).<sup>47</sup>

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## NOTES

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3. Minutes of the West Amazon Conference, vote no. 1989-013, 23; Leila C. Silva Teodoro, interviewed by phone by Yonara Taiane Torres, November 10, 2017.
4. Simone Machado (ASuR secretary), interviewed by Yonara Taiane Torres, Ji-Paraná, Rondônia, 2016.
5. Leonardo Nunes (secretary of ASuR), interviewed by Yonara Taiane Torres, Ji-Paraná, Rondônia, 2017.
6. Ibid.
7. "Unições e instituições" ["Unions and institutions"], *Revista Adventista*, January 1974, 24, 25.
8. "Notícias da Central-Amazonas" ["News from Central-Amazonas"], *Revista Adventista*, September 1975, 18.
9. Leonardo Nunes (secretary of ASuR), interviewed by Yonara Taiane Torres, Ji-Paraná, Rondônia, 2017.
10. "Uninorte Notícias" ["News from North Union"], *Revista Adventista*, July 1976, 23.
11. Wilson Sarli, "Colportores da União Norte-Brasileira em Marcha" ["Canvassers of the North Brazil Union on the Move"], *Revista Adventista* 75, no. 2 (February 1980): 28-31.
12. "Crescimento e Desafios" ["Growth and Challenges"], *Revista Adventista*, November 1981, 18.
13. "Educação Floresce no Amazonas" ["Education flourishes in Amazonas"], *Revista Adventista*, April 1988, 26.
14. "Apocalipse fecha Igreja Católica em Rondônia" ["Revelation closes Catholic Church in Rondônia"], *Revista Adventista*, January 1990, 18.
15. "West Amazon Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1992), 284-285.
16. "Global Mission is the front-line mission arm of the Adventist Mission, a department at the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Global Mission projects begin as local initiatives. It supports local frontline ministry initiatives in areas not penetrated [by the Adventist Church] and helps to involve all church departments in this task." *Portal of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, "What is a Global Mission," accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/35Wz9e0>.
17. "Estabelecida uma nova congregação" ["A new congregation established"], *Revista Adventista*, July 1992, 24.
18. "Professores são batizados em Rondônia" ["Teachers are baptized in Rondônia"], *Revista Adventista*, October 1994, 34.

19. "Evangelismo supera oposição em Cabixi" ["Evangelism overcomes opposition in Cabixi"], *Revista Adventista*, October 1995, 43.
20. "Edital de Convocação da Assembleia Geral Denominacional de Instalação e Organização da Associação Sul de Rondônia da IASD" ["Call Notice for the Denominational General Assembly of Installation and Organization of the South Rondonia Conference of the SDA"], *Revista Adventista*, 102, no. 1191 (August 2007): 31.
21. Ibid.
22. Vanderlei José Vianna, "Rondônia tem uma nova Associação" ["Rondônia has a new conference"], *Revista Adventista* 102, no. 1195 (December 2007): 26.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Richele Reis, "Asur promove Impacto Esperança" ["Asur promotes Impact Hope"], *Revista Adventista* 103, no. 1199 (April 2008): 34.
26. Arlindo Kefler Filho, "Nova Associação da UNB inicia 2008 com muitas atividades" ["The New UNB Conference begins 2008 with many activities"], *Revista Adventista* 103, no. 1198 (March 2008): 31.
27. "Caleb Mission project is a volunteer program, social service, and a witnessing that challenges the Adventist youth to dedicate their vacations to evangelism in places where there's no Adventist presence, to strengthen the small congregations and gain new people for the kingdom of God." *Portal da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia [Seventh-day Adventist Website]*, "Missão Calebe 2020" ["Caleb Mission 2020"], accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2HRpvRi>.
28. Aquino Filho, "Jovens do Norte batizam 3395 pessoas nas férias" ["Young people from the North baptize 3,395 people on vacation"], *Revista Adventista* 104, no. 1217 (October 2009): 40; Jackson França, Anita Leite, Dayse Bezerra, Hêller de Freitas, Ivanilson Araújo and Ana Paula Ramos, "Movidos pelo desafio" ["Moved by the challenge"], *Revista Adventista* 105, no. 1229 (October 2010): 29.
29. The Pathfinders Club is made up of "boys and girls aged 10 to 15 years old, from different social classes, color, religion. They meet in general once a week to learn how to develop talents, skills, perceptions and a taste for nature." These boys and girls "vibrate with outdoor activities. They like camps, hiking, climbing, explorations in the woods and caves. They can cook outdoors, making fire without phosphorus." In addition, they demonstrate "skill with discipline through united order and have creativity awakened by the manual arts. They fight, also, the use of the tobacco, alcohol and drugs." *Portal da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia [Seventh-day Adventist Website]*, "Quem somos" ["Who we are"], accessed February 4, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2FDRqTh>.
30. "The Adventurers Club is a program for children from 6 to 9 years old, created by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1972. [...] At the meetings, children carry out activities with a focus on physical, mental and spiritual development." *Seventh-day Adventist Church - Central*

Caxias do Sul - RS, "Clube de Aventureiros: Duquinhos" ["Adventurers Club Duquinhos"], accessed February 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/389AQGG>.

31. Adventurers Family Camp is a camp held with boys and girls from the Adventurers Club with their parents. At this camp, children listen to Bible stories, play games, and can enjoy a special time with friends and family. Pamela Meireles, "Adventurers Family Camp incentiva crianças a se tornarem missionárias" ["Adventurers Family Camp encourages children to become missionaries"], Adventist News Network, July 5, 2017, accessed July 4, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2YAllww>.
32. "Para todas as idades" ["For all ages"], *Revista Adventista*, September 2009, 35; Luiz Enrik P. Silva, "1º Aventuri da ASuR em Ji-Paraná" ["ASuR's 1st Adventurers Family Camp in Ji-Paraná"], Rede Notícias [News Network], June 25, 2009, accessed August 20, 2019, <https://bit.ly/31OKGul>.
33. *ASUR's Pathfinders and Adventurers Ministries*, "Statistics - South Rondônia Conference," accessed March 17, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2UMxkPe>.
34. "The Spring Baptism was created by pastor Ademar Quint in Rio de Janeiro, and it takes place annually in churches. The aim is to encourage juvenile and young people to give themselves to Jesus. In 2013, this event celebrated 50 years, and more than one million people are already baptized on this special date." Accessed January 7, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2s3e0RL>.
35. Tatiane Virmes, "Batismo da primavera é celebrado na cidade de Cacoal-RO" ["Spring baptism is celebrated in the city of Cacoal-RO"], Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News], October 1, 2014, accessed February 24, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2HT0ynU>.
36. "North Brazil Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2009), 272-273.
37. Rubens Lessa, *Construtores de esperança: na trilha dos pioneiros adventistass da Amazônia* ["Builders of hope: on the trail of Adventist pioneers in the Amazon"] (Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2016), 158-161; Leila C. Silva Teodoro, email message to Liliane Bastos, December 5, 2016; "Northwest Brazil Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2010), 286.
38. "Breaking the Silence is an annual project, developed since 2002, by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in 8 countries of South America (Argentina, Brazi, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay) that aims to educate and prevent against the domestic abuse and violence." *Seventh-day Adventist Church Website*, "Breaking the Silence," accessed February 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2WoDflw>.
39. The project "Impact Hope is a program that encourages reading and provides for the annual mass distribution of books by Seventh-day Adventists in the territory of South America." *Seventh-day Adventist Church Website*, "Impact Hope," accessed February 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/34dZROO>.
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41. Adventistas Sul de Rondônia, Facebook post, August 24, 2019 (14:26 p.m.), accessed February 12, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2wclQ8A>.

42. Aline Paulino, "Voluntários atendem moradores de aldeia indígena" ["Volunteers serve indigenous village residents"], Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News Network], November 22, 2019, accessed February 24, 2020, .
43. Aline Paulino, "Espaço Novo Tempo é inaugurado no sul de Rondônia" ["Hope Center of Influences is inaugurated in the south of Rondônia"], Notícias Adventistas [Adventist News], December 17, 2019, accessed February 24, 2020, [http:// bit.ly/2Vib3sP](http://bit.ly/2Vib3sP).
44. João Peixoto (president of ASuR), interviewed by Yonara Taiane Torres, Ji-Paraná, Rondônia, 2018.
45. Idem.
46. "South Rondonia Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2008), 276; "South Rondonia Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018), 250. For more details about all administrative officers, consult the *SDA Yearbooks* from 2008 to 2018.
47. More information about ASuR can be found at their website at [asur.adventistas.org](http://asur.adventistas.org) or through their social media on Facebook: @AdvSulRondonia, Twitter: @ASURNoticias, and Youtube: ASuR Notícias.

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