

What Is the Meaning of the Arcs of Ascent and Descent in the Souls of the Master and the Disciple?

What Is the Meaning of the Arcs of Ascent and Descent in the Souls of the Master and Disciple, and How Does It Occur?

In this lesson, we will examine the concept of the arcs of ascent and descent—a concept familiar to many of us, though perhaps not under this mystical and philosophical title! The word *seir* (journey) means passing through several stages to reach a particular destination. Given this meaning, what do ascent and descent signify here?

From a materialistic perspective, ascent and descent mean going up or down from a particular point, level, or place. These words have different meanings depending on the context. Perhaps the most important use of the word *descent* is regarding the Quran. The *nuzūl* (descent) of the Quran is an immaterial process of transferring Allah's messages to the heart of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him and his family)¹.

If we want to use these words in the context of transmitting concepts, their meanings depend on the essence of what is being transmitted and received. The essence of what passes between the master and the disciple determines the start and end points of the arcs of ascent and descent in their souls.

Reviewing previous lessons helps understand the concept of the arcs of ascent and descent in the souls of the master and disciple. We have previously noted that

¹. "into your heart [O Prophet]—so that you may be one of the warners." (Quran, 26:194)

these arcs occur during the transformation of immaterial concepts or phenomena into material forms and vice versa. The concepts exchanged between the master and disciple are of this type; therefore, the arcs of ascent and descent exist in this relationship as well. By examining how knowledge, science, art, and other information are transmitted by a master and how these concepts are received by the disciple, we can clearly understand the arcs of ascent and descent in their souls. In this lesson, we will separately explore the master's descending journey and the disciple's ascending journey and introduce their respective destination points.

The Arc of Descent or the Master's Descending Journey

To analyze the arcs of ascent and descent in the souls of the master and disciple, we first consider the master's role and rank. The master's role and responsibility is to transmit and teach concepts in which he has mastery and skill. The master's descending journey is the path by which his existential assets and knowledge, after passing through several stages, are transferred to the disciple in a special way.

Establishing communication and transferring concepts from the master to the disciple is not possible by just any method. Usually, we consider masters in each field as people who possess a set of existential qualities and perfections in that domain. But does merely possessing perfections alone enable communication, transfer of concepts, and influencing the disciple? For example, if a highly knowledgeable master simply attends a class physically, can his presence alone benefit the students? Certainly not. The master must find an appropriate way to establish communication with the disciples and convey his knowledge to them.

Stages of Transferring and Transforming Information in the Master's Descending Journey

Depending on the master's expertise and the subject to be taught, the start and end points of the arcs of ascent and descent in their souls are determined. The master's initial rank is in either the supra-rational realm, intellect, or imagination. The master's descending journey in spiritual matters and divine sciences begins from the supra-rational realm; in intellective matters such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry, the master starts from the realm of intellect; and in artistic and imaginative topics, the realm of imagination is the starting point. Wherever the master's starting point is, he must descend proportionally to lower realms until he reaches the material realm where the disciple can receive. God's manifestation also follows this path: His manifestations descend from the realm of Jabarut to Malakut, then Barzakh and the realm of imagination, and finally to Nasut or the material world.

To teach supra-rational concepts, the master must bring the content from the supra-rational realm down to the intellective realm—characterized by thought, form, and rules. The master must reflect on the content he knows and teach the disciple the knowledge, rules, and formulas so the disciple can comprehend the supra-rational concepts. However, at this intellective stage, communication between the master and disciple has not yet been established, and lower realms still must be traversed.

The realms of estimation and imagination lie below the intellect, and the master must use imagination to transfer concepts into these realms and find understandable forms for the disciple. For example, if the master and disciple do

not share the same language, the master must imagine how to interact and speak properly with the disciple and find the correct communication method.

The material realm is the meeting point of the arcs of ascent and descent—here the connection between the master and disciple is established. In other realms, only transformations for transmission and reception occur.

The immaterial concepts and truths that the master holds must be expressed as words and sounds in the material realm to be transferred to the disciple. Until the disciple's eyes and ears receive these words and sounds, communication is not established.

The Importance of Speech in the Master-Disciple Communication

We use different words and terms to describe various concepts and phenomena. To understand immaterial phenomena, we have to use words, which are material by nature; for example, the word *Allah* and other divine names and attributes used to comprehend God's infinite reality and establish existential connection with Him. To describe each of God's attributes, we need to use a specific word.

God is a unified existence with various manifestations. All creations—including humans, the solar system, planets, stars, angels, forests, and seas—are manifestations of God appearing in different forms, but God Himself is none of these. To know God and understand His immaterial, we must pay attention to His manifestations in the material world. The arcs of ascent and descent in the souls of the master and disciple have the same mechanism. The master transfers his immaterial knowledge and perfections through different languages in the form of

words and material sounds to the disciple, but his true essence is not these words and sounds; they are like mirrors reflecting the master's qualities, beauties, and perfections.

Since speech is the critical meeting point of the arcs of ascent and descent in the souls of the master and disciple, the master must have strength and clarity in this area; otherwise, he cannot fully express the deep truths within him. The importance of eloquence becomes clearer when we know that supra-rational and immaterial contents lose much of their subtlety upon reaching the stage of speech, and weak speech intensifies this loss.

The Arc of Ascent or the Disciple's Ascending Journey

The stages that the master and disciple pass through in their arcs are similar but opposite in direction. The disciple ascends by hearing the master's words, initiating the process of transforming matter into an immaterial and pure form. He receives matter in the form of words and sounds through his senses of sight and hearing, then imagines them in the realm of imagination. The next stage is the realm of intellect, where the disciple reflects on his imaginations and uses mathematical relations to convert them into intellective matters. The final stage is entering the supra-rational realm and transforming intellective forms into immaterial concepts and truths. Reaching this stage provides the foundation for the disciple to become similar to the master.

If all the disciple's faculties—hearing, imagination, estimation, intellect, and supra-rational one—are pure and free from sin and inner obstacles, the concepts pass through the material realm and the disciple comprehends the master's words.

Under such conditions, after one or more sessions, the disciple can absorb, in his supra-rational dimension, all the concepts transmitted by the master. These absorbed concepts become the source of power, peace, and happiness in the disciple, and he becomes the possessor of a luminous truth.

Receiving sounds and matter compatible with the disciple's mental structure is essential. For example, if the master speaks a language unknown to the disciple, no concept is transferred; the master has only delivered sounds. Therefore, the role and importance of understanding meanings should not be overlooked.

Impurities and anxiety in any part of the disciple's dimensions of being prevent the transformation of received concepts; the disciple remains merely a listener, unable to convert the concepts in imagination, intellect, and the supra-rational faculty.

In this lesson, we examined the arcs of ascent and descent in the souls of the master and disciple. The master's true essence and what he possesses is an immaterial concept and truth belonging to the realm of Jabarut. The master must descend this truth stepwise into the realm of Malakut and then the realm of imagination.

The master's realm differs from the disciple's, and a path must exist for the disciple to enter the master's world. For this, masters must transform their immaterial knowledge into words and sounds, which are material and perceptible concepts.

After receiving the master's sounds and words, the disciple begins his ascending journey and, through imagination, reflection, and structuring what he has received, transforms them into immaterial concepts. If conditions such as inner purity and freedom from anxiety are met, the received concepts are absorbed by the disciple's supra-rational dimension, creating the basis for his similarity to the master.