

Arc of Descent and Arc of Ascent | Stages of Human Existence

The Arc of Descent and Arc of Ascent; the Stages of Human Life, from God to God

In this lesson, we want to discuss a philosophical concept known as the arc of descent and arc of ascent or the cycle of human life in the realm of existence. Although this concept may seem a bit complicated, it is very fascinating, and we use it repeatedly throughout the day without knowing what it is. Even now, as you are reading this article, your subconscious is using the arc of ascent to comprehend the content. However, this process happens so quickly and unconsciously that you do not notice it. But what does the process of the arc of descent and arc of ascent involve? What is its relation to the stages of human life?

Every non-material concept within our heart goes through stages in our soul before it transforms into words and is articulated. This process is called the arc of descent. For instance, love and affection are non-material concepts which reside in the heart. In order for these concepts to be transformed into words and conveyed through language, they are first transferred to the mind. This is the first stage of descent. Then, the mind seeks suitable words and phrases for this concept which is the next stage of descent. Eventually, these words are given sound and expressed in phrases such as "I love you"; this is the last stage of descent.

But what is the arc of ascent? In this example, the arch of ascent occurs in the soul of our audience. The audience hears the sound that comes out of our voice box and

sends it for analysis to her mind, which is immaterial in essence. This is the first stage of ascent. Her mind analyzes these phrases and understands their meaning, which is the next stage of ascent. Finally, this concept is transferred to her heart, which is also non-material, and she is influenced by what we say. This is the final stage of ascent.

This was a simple example of the arc of descent and arc of ascent in the human soul, and we explained the process behind them. This very process also occurs when creating artworks. When an artist wants to express his inner feelings— which are non-material and intellectual in essence— in poetry, stories, paintings, music, and so on and to convey them to the audience, he goes through the stages of the arch of descent in his soul. The audience also goes through the stages of the arch of ascent, step by step, to understand these concepts in her own soul. Therefore, in general, the arc of descent and arc of ascent occur when converting all non-material concepts or phenomena into material and all material phenomena into non-material ones. Based on this, the entire realm of existence referred to as the Circle of Existence, also possesses both the arc of descent and arc of ascent, which we will explain further.

The Concept of the Circle of Existence and the Origin of the Existence of Beings

The entire realm of existence, from its origin to resurrection, forms a cycle that is known as the "Circle of Existence" among Islamic scholars and philosophers.¹ However, do not set up borders in your mind, as it continues infinitely, and it is

¹ The wise are a central point in the script of existence, but love knows that they whirl within this very circle. (Hafiz)
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impossible to exit it. In other words, it is not the case that existence exists in the circle, and there is nothingness or non-existence outside it. The entire realm of existence is unified, boundless, and borderless, without a beginning or an end. Why do we say that it is impossible to exit the Circle of Existence? Because if existence were to come to an end at any point, naturally, what lies beyond would either be existence or non-existence. If it is existence, it is just an extension of the same existence. If it is non-existence, then non-existence does not exist. This is because one thing cannot simultaneously exist and do not exist. If non-existence "existed," it would no longer be named "non-existence"!

We derive another conclusion from the unity and boundlessness of existence: Existence is just one. This is because if two existences were to exist, naturally, there would be a distance between them. This distance must be filled by either existence or non-existence. Non-existence cannot fill this distance because it does not exist. If it were to be filled with existence, then there would be no difference between one existence and the other. Therefore, existence is singular and unique. But what is the name of this unique, infinite existence which has no beginning or end?

This unique and infinite existence is named '*Huwa*'.¹² Who is '*Huwa*'? '*Huwa*' is the same one that we all seek and are in love with. The same infinity that we look for throughout our lives, not knowing where to find Him. The one that we sometimes mistake for wealth, fame, power, science, and so on. He is the one that is the origin of our desire for infinity. This being is '*Huwa*': "*Qul Huwa Allahu ahad*" (Say: He, Allah, is One).³

². He

³. Quran, 112:1

What is the difference between '*Huwa*' and 'Allah'? When '*Huwa*' is individuated and manifests itself through all its names and attributes, it is referred to as 'Allah.' Therefore, Allah is indeed that '*Huwa*,' which has become individuated and is comprehensible to human beings. Allah is present in everything, yet He is not tangible or visible. All phenomena in the world are also manifestations of Allah, and Allah is the beginning and end of everything. In other words, everything begins with Allah and ultimately ends to Him. But how? How do beings begin with Allah and end to Him? To answer this question, we must refer to the arc of descent and arc of ascent in the realm of existence.

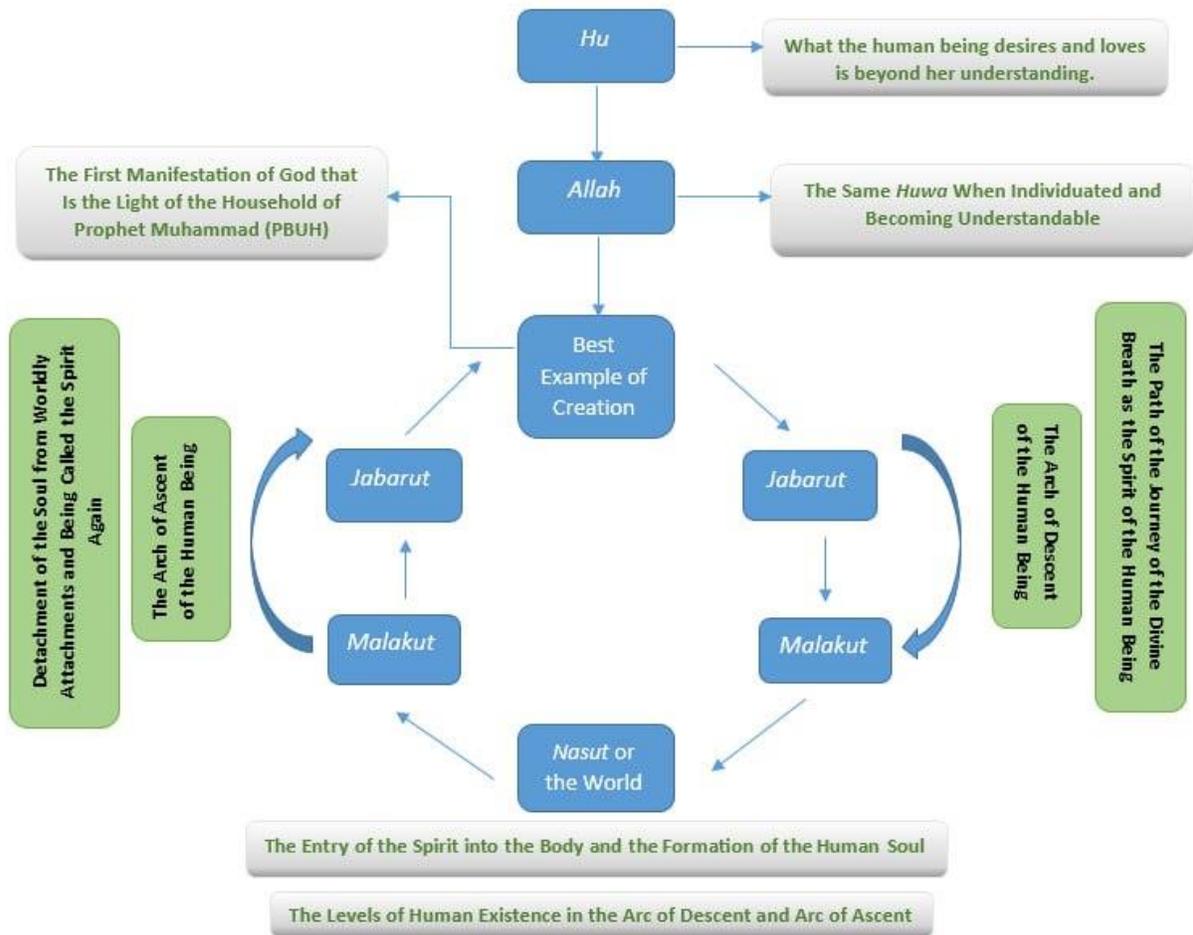
The Arc of Descent in the Human Being and other Components of Existence

As we stated in previous lessons, God (Allah) has created all beings and all levels of existence from a primordial creation, that is actually considered the first manifestation of God Himself. This being, who entirely possesses all the perfections of God, is known by various names such as the best example of creation, the deputy of Allah, the spirit, the light of the People of the Household of the Prophet (PBUT), and the Tablet and Pen.⁴ Therefore, the first creation of God is the origin and source of the existence of other creations. God first created *Alam Jabarut* (World of the Intellect or Noetic Domain) from this being, then *Alam Malakut* (Celestial World), and ultimately *Alam Nasut*, which is called "the world" due to its lower status compared to other worlds. This is the arc of descent of the realm of existence. But what is the arc of descent for humans?

⁴. *Lawh* and *Qalam*

Conception happens in this world. Therefore, in order for the human to become the bearer of the Divine Spirit and come into existence, the best example of creation must go down through the realms of existence, such as *Jabarut* and *Malakut*, one by one, descending step by step until it enters *Alam Nasut* and becomes attached to the fetus in the womb.⁵ This event occurs around the fourth month of pregnancy, and from then on, the fetus becomes the deputy of Allah. It means that he can manifest all the names, attributes, and perfections of God on earth and acquire a status which even angels are not able to achieve. Of course, this ability is potential, and since many human beings make wrong decisions and do not follow their true mentors, they do not attain this status, and sometimes they even become lower than animals. This was the arc of descent. Now let us see how the arc of ascent and return to God unfolds.

⁵ Quran, 38:72



H4: The Arc of Ascent of the Human Being and Return to God

After a person dies, her soul separates from her body. Our soul's duty is to detach from worldly attachments and the lower perfections to become like the origin of existence. The more the soul detaches from worldly attachments, the closer it gets to the purpose of its creation and the more it can actualize its inherent potentials. After the death of the body, the soul is free from all attachments and once again becomes worthy of being called the "spirit." The body remains in this world and the

soul follows the same path it came from and enters *Barzakh* or *Malakut*. From then until the time of the Resurrection, all human spirits will live in *Barzakh*. After the Resurrection, which lasts for fifty thousand years, another stage of the existence of the spirit begins. Depending on how much the soul has become similar to the Origin of Existence and the living conditions in the *Malakut*, it will experience either the Heaven or Hell. Which category each person falls into depends on the type of her birth into *Barzakh*.

This lesson provided an overview of the arc of descent of the human being to the world and his arc of ascent and the process of his return to God. In the following lessons, we will provide more explanations about the types of birth into *Barzakh*. If you have any questions or doubts about the arc of descent and arc of ascent, as presented in this lesson, please feel free to share them with us.