

## The Arch

An arch is a very interesting structure where a single stone, placed at the highest point in the opening, is the key to stability and strength. Until placing this final stone, the structure needs external support for stability. It is like this on an introspective journey toward self-realization, which is essentially a spiritual journey. I use the term self-realization because this paper is not about any structure. This paper is about all structures designed to support an area of investigation that science cannot address, which is the unique “felt” sense each of us has before self-realization, although science can provide some tools to aid in this effort. The structure of a belief system supports this kind of journey until the last piece is in place. It is fitting that the last piece before stability in the spiritual journey, leads to unending connection with infinite love.

This paper relates the progression of a spiritual journey to that of building of an arch. There are many analogies between a spiritual journey and constructing an arch whereas describing the spiritual or introspective path is both difficult to put into words and difficult to define a location on the path. Those far along on the path may feel a sense of completion through the numerous realizations that occur along the way. However, the spiritual path can feel like a journey without reference while in complete darkness until arrival. It keeps a person wondering until the point of true completion. Even after a true completion of an effort to self-realize, the difficult task of representing self-realization through action still exists. Make no mistake; it is an arduous journey, which is fraught with risk. Each interim completion feels like it takes everything to get there, yet you pick yourself up only to see that the climb continues.

As a journeyer moves further along, each climb looks to be more impossible than the last, only to find yet another climb ahead. These interim completions are rest stops, however brief they may seem. At some point, to stop and turn back is not an option. The path behind has all but

disappeared and to blaze a trail backwards is more difficult than continuing forward. The purpose of “The Arch” is to encourage those courageous few who continue ahead even when the challenge of putting one foot in front of the other seems insurmountable! Take heart in the knowledge that most people never begin.

To be on a path toward spiritual transcendence/self-realization is a gift beyond all others. Take care not to define an arrival because there are many false arrivals. A false arrival is really a realization or a completion in understanding that serves to replenish energy reserves for continuing the journey. If you define an arrival before finishing, you risk misleading yourself and others. The world is full of self-described Gurus who preach love and obedience. Obedience is not part of the process; therefore, if someone starts issuing directives to obey, then they are a false prophet. Remember to trust your heart and know the mind will repeatedly try to define an interim completion as an arrival. Trust within comes from the knowledge that this gift of life presents itself only to those who can complete and it comes without expectation or exchange. Understanding this becomes an opening of discovery in trust of the heart.

The ultimate goal in this introspective journey is to achieve such purity of heart that no hardship is too much. Each completion in self-understanding prepares you for the greatest challenge of all, which is a journey through the “dark night of the soul”. The bible puts it this way in Psalm 23:4, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”. This process is not without fear because until this point the ego has defined existence. The great existential philosopher, Franz Kafka addresses the issues of the mind in his “Three Parables”. In his parable “Before the Law”, he addresses the fear associated with the process of standing outside the mind of experience. The doorkeeper in the story is the ego. The doorkeeper in the story warns a person that he will not stop them from entering; however, the passageways

are filled with more doorways that contain things, which are truly terrifying. The doorkeeper warns the traveler that the further they go the more terrifying each doorway becomes. This person sits outside the entrance waiting to enter for their entire life wondering why no other traveler has ever approached. At the very end of life, the person finally asks why no other person has ever come to enter for the riches rumored to be held within. The doorkeeper tells this person just before death that it is because this doorway is only for you.

Each step on the way to self-realization is a step toward your true self and a step away from the false self, as defined by the ego. The lesson in the story of “Before the Law” is to ignore the doorkeeper, but respect the warning. When a person is born, it is like the birth of a star that continues to burn brighter through self-definition. As Jack Engler said, “you have to become somebody before you can become nobody”. As this “somebody” becomes well defined, a person may become more and more aware that this self-definition is a fallacy. In some spiritual traditions, the fallacy of self-description is described as an illusion; however, until transcendence or self-realization that illusion is who you are in every respect. This is what the fear and terror a person faces is all about. The term “dark night of the soul” comes from this understanding. A person feels like they are losing themselves when the actuality is that they are finding themselves. It is a beautiful trick of the mind to preserve the ego as the definer of self, when self-definition is not necessary and is actually detrimental to a satisfying existence. There are riches beyond description in self-realization.

The ego is about recognition, and demands much of a person as well as those around them. The message is to fear not treating a person with respect to how they see themselves. The emotional center of this persona is the heart. Unfortunately, emotion has become a confusing tangle of the current situation and experience, which is intertwined with emotion. This emotional

identification with experience is what gives a person a feeling of continuity and prevents them from fully engaging in the present. The heart then speaks with a voice from the past and has many voices depending on what experience is present in the moment. Typically, there is a conglomeration of experiences present at any given moment. Therefore, a person's self-definition gives the heart many voices having to do completely with self-interest, which is what the ego is all about promoting. Emotion itself also connects a person on both a conscious and subconscious level to every experience where that emotion was present. Intertwined emotion is what gives a person the sense of himself or herself they feel is their identity, or what makes them "who they are". This "identity" is a false need that keeps a person from a satisfying existence.

A clean heart, speaking with a single voice is what safely guides you through a spiritual transcendence. This means that "dropping the ego" is only the beginning, yet this step alone is the product of numerous transitions of realization. This "single" voice of the heart is the only true voice, which is that of love held within. Allow no person to disturb this voice and every action becomes special, absent of cause or reason; however, every action has purpose. It is the first step toward enlightenment and it is an experience of enlightenment itself. There is more than one level of which I have described only the first one, that of purifying the heart. The actual experience of "dropping the ego" will be the result of a single defining event where a communication with spirit takes place. You will have communicated with a presence of infinite love. You have only released your conscience from the torment of experience. Your mind has been released, yet your physical self continues to hold experience through training. The brain and body have yet to reconfigure. This cannot happen until your heart has reached the purity to withstand the process. It may have seemed hard to get to this point, yet the real work is still ahead.

Actions honoring this one true voice are actions performed in the context of love. Even those who would deceive cannot cause harm, for love is the only absolute in the universe and therefore without condition. A person such as this, then moves forward in the world without fear. It is the seeds of doubt, which invade our person and open us up to harm in the world. Doubt means we always can look in retrospect and know a different course. Whereas taking a true course always allows us to address those mistakes, which are an inevitable part of the human condition.

This leads to the false image we carry of ourselves, which is the image created through developing an ego. This image is what gives our heart many voices. It is a story of the mind, which is constructed through experience and held together with an ever changing complexity of emotion. When the mind speaks for the heart, it is hijacking emotion and relating that emotion to the past. The emotion of experiences introduces doubt, tries to conform the future to the past, and demands satisfaction. An action then contains both the truth of a person and the truth of a person's perception of experience. Since a person's collection of experiences continues to change, the truth of experience is a false truth. Plato once said that "truth is that which does not change". There is conflict here, because it is nearly impossible to discern actual truth from false truth. We can never know how much we are connected to the emotion of the moment, related to connection with emotion of experience. This is the story of spiritual transcendence; to take emotion out of experience and place it in the only place it belongs, which is the present. It makes perfect sense when considering that the body is what produces emotion and the body is of the present.

Removing this sense of false truth is not so easy, yet worth the effort, for through the spiritual process the heart gains strength. On the way to strength of heart, it seems like the

progression is more toward weakness. It is one of the many ways the mind maintains control, while trying to move us along a predictable path. We can get locked into patterns of behavior that does not serve us; unlike the ability to ride a bike, which is an acceptable pattern of behavior. Removing that last seed of doubt in the quality of action takes what appears weak and transforms it into unimaginable strength.

The process of cleansing the heart is like building the support columns for an arch. You start with the sides, placing each block on top of one another, building up the two sides at the same time. With an arch you define the opening through how far apart the first blocks are placed from each other. In the case of a spiritual journey, the two columns of blocks are in place next to each other; with no apparent opening at all! Although there is no opening yet, you are removing the cement that binds the heart and mind together. Those first steps are magical as new skills of perception are gained in addition to all the knowledge acquired from experience.

The purpose here is to understand that the ultimate goal is to separate emotion of experience from experience itself, so that felt emotion is located only in the present. It is tricky when considering that each moment fades into the past as the new moment arrives. On an intellectual level, you are trying to reach a point of no emotional connection with each passing moment. The problem is that emotional connection with experience is what feeds and creates the ego, thus the false sense of self. Who you are is dependent on this mechanism and at first, it seems like you are becoming detached or not caring about what just happened. You can begin to feel lost when having the feeling of no connection with what just happened. Since emotion is what creates identification with the past and hence produces an ego, the sense of nothingness is overwhelming. What is really happening is not detachment, but no attachment, which is completely opposite to detachment. No attachment allows a person full engagement with

emotion and the reality of what is happening, not what has happened. Without the separation, a current experience will always contain some identification with the past.

When identifying with the past, a person has some attention drawn away from a present focused awareness. The emotion related to the current experience is then split between the past and present. Now this new experience, once recorded, has some component of the past associated with the present. You can begin to see what an impossible knot this is to unravel. A critical part of a successful journey is appreciating how special you are to have come to this point of exploration. This appreciation will serve you well. Fail to appreciate and you will find regret when you say goodbye to your dearest friend, which is your own self as defined by the ego.

The process of deconstructing emotion from experience creates much of the turmoil on a spiritual journey. On the other hand, there are great rewards along the way. These rewards define the resting places to regain strength for the next steps. The further along a spiritual path, the more precarious our internal stability can feel. It takes great courage and faith to proceed. After a certain point, there is no return to stability other than forging ahead. For those who continue far enough; fear and terror invade the mind, which threatens our very existence. However, with careful preparation and good support, this does not have to be a journey taken alone or fraught with danger.

One column of our spiritual arch represents the mind and one column represents the heart. The greater the opening created between the two columns, the greater the split between the mind and body. Constructing the arch represents the increasing uneasiness that begins to take hold. This uneasiness is the result of the opening you have created, which represents the understanding that experience need not connect to present felt emotion. The separation of experience from emotion feels like a loss when in truth it is not a loss. To understand that fear

and terror are a part of this process is a tool to help control these feelings, which can become constant companions. Consider that, as with the arch, you are just beginning to build a bridge between the heart and mind that heals the split, which is felt through creating an opening into the unknown. This opening is unbounded, since there is no longer a solid feeling of connection between past and present. As with the arch, the opening under construction is not completely defined until the center piece is in place. At this point external support is required to continue this process of self-realization to a point of success.

It has already been hard enough to get to this point and yet, it is about to get more difficult and feel even more unstable. Those who reach this point of separation need guidance. A person is usually driven along this far through past experiences of great suffering while maintaining a good heart. On the other hand, the ego made you a slave to its constant need and unrelenting dissatisfaction. Realizing the demands the ego places on a person is to recognize suffering at its deepest level. Suffering creates the drive and having survived delivers the strength to persevere. Looking back at building an arch you can see that as you begin to construct the arch; neither side seems stable at all. It is like that when separating the mind from the heart. The opening that has been created is into the interior of the self; looking toward the center of being. It is a view into an abyss that has no bottom. There is sound psychological reason for why this is true. If we define ourselves in some particular way, we have the definer and the defined. If we become aware of this then we have an observer of the definer. To follow this reasoning to its logical conclusion means that we arrive at a place of “something in nothing”, that is indefinable. It is here we exist only in possibility, at the center of being.

It is useful to look at what meaning the columns themselves have related to a person's experience. One column is built of blocks that are initially cemented together with the emotional

column, so to speak. This column is experience, which is an objective measure of the events that take place in a person's life. It is easy to break down the experiential column into significant events, which relate to individual blocks in the column. The other column is related to emotion associated with the different experiential events. It is the subjective aspect of each experience and is not represented as individual blocks. The column is solid, without breaks. This is because the complexity of emotion is a constantly changing template; directly related to each time a particular emotion is experienced.

The way experience is recorded and intertwined with a changing emotional template, makes separation of past experience and associated emotion difficult to address directly. The fact is that every spiritual belief system and psychological paradigm deals with the issue indirectly. An example may help show why this separation is even important; whether or not a person is focused on spiritual development. Imagine having been involved in a bad car accident on a particular stretch of road. Now imagine being on the same stretch of road and having to take evasive action to avoid another accident. The odds of avoiding another accident are greatly increased if emotion is contained to the current situation and lessons learned from the previous experience are adapted to the present action. However, if the emotional trauma of the previous accident detracts from an appropriate emotional response, which can heighten awareness, then the odds on avoiding another accident are greatly reduced. This is an obvious example, yet shows a truth, that in every case; past emotion does no more than intrude on the needs of a current experience, in some cases, with disastrous results.

Separating the two columns is an exercise in un-cementing each block in the column of experience and moving these blocks far enough apart from the column of emotion to create an opening. This act of deconstruction may feel good at first; however it will appear more and more

unstable as the process continues. In fact it is not stable; you are choosing a path that creates instability on both sides. The mind becomes more troubled, convinced you are doing something wrong, and the heart becomes increasingly unsure. This emotional discomfort is a result of the mind attempting to cast doubt and from the process of simplifying emotion.

Take an emotion of happiness for example. A current feeling of happiness interrelates with every experience of this emotion in your entire life up to this latest experience. The past suggests how happy to be, if happiness is justified, if it is fleeting, and so on. Happiness has a familiar feeling and yet it has become an extremely complex emotion. Deconstructing emotion from past experience changes every emotional experience in a way that is not comfortable at first. In the case of happiness, the emotion becomes more and more related to the present reason for happiness; having a purity that can even be recognized as less happy than before. It is all very confusing. However, with a little time the purity of present focused emotion has beauty beyond description. It has only become less complex.

What is taking place, using the arch analogy, is defining the solid subjective emotional column in segments that are more directly connected with the experience and the complexity of the emotion that existed at the time. Whereas before, each time an experience was recalled our current template of emotion was applied, rather than the template that existed at the time of the experience. Simplifying emotion allows a person to see the complexity of emotion associated with previous experience without attachment. It also allows for a more accurate recollection of memories, because no memory is actually stored as a computer might store data on a hard drive. Memories are reconstructed with every recollection.

The feeling of the past and present is an actual split that must be managed within. You no longer feel as you did, yet no person on the outside can see or is willing to recognize the

difference. Your columns, so to speak, are separate and you have created the opening into the interior of your being. You may even feel “enlightened” at this point. You are present focused and feel little connection to emotion of the past. Rest assured that you have only found an interim completion.

You have taken a major step; however, you have a presence in the world and a past that needs connection into the present to attain that which you have been searching for. The support structures have been prepared to build the arch. You have entered into the “valley of the shadow of death” or “the dark night of the soul”. The actuality is that you have entered this phase some time ago and not realized it. You have reached the point where the separation exists and the hard work of creating the arch that connects the mind and heart through a single point begins. You are defining a space that is a doorway into the infinite, which an existence that dwells only in possibility. That you can now look within exists, yet there is only darkness to see. It is time to step inside as you have prepared to connect with the spirit, which is a connection with infinite love.

To this point, a person has likely experienced numerous intense spiritual realizations; each of which has created the separation for the opening you now face. It is trusting in a spiritual belief system that allows building of the arch itself from each column toward the center of the opening. Remember external support is required for the actual building of an arch until the center stone is in place, which connects the two sides and defines a strong entrance into the infinite. Both sides must be braced and each stone of the arch must be supported. It is this way on a spiritual journey, especially when traversing “the dark night of the soul”. Stepping into this opening is akin to falling into an abyss. The opening behind you closes, leaving you in total darkness. The process of finishing the arch is what creates the path back out of darkness. The

path is toward the center of this darkness, which leads the way out. Every instinct demands you to turn around and try to find the opening from which you have just come. Again, it is all very confusing.

The closer the sides come to joining, the more precarious the whole structure becomes and the closer to the center of being you have come. You need knowledge gained within a spiritual belief system as structural support for the mind and you need the belief system itself as structural support for the heart. It is support for subject and object, until they can be joined to form a single understanding. It is not much different than understanding the truth of any situation, taking perspective, and then acting in accordance to a balance between two understandings. We do this as human beings everyday, in all situations we face. In this case, we are talking about the ultimate prize of self-understanding. The center of being is where you will find the light to lead the way out. This light is you, it is your true self, and it is what connects with infinite love. The magic is that once you reach this center you are both inside and outside at the same time. There is no path out and no path in because you are already in both places.

The mind is concerned with external objective structure, and the heart is concerned with internal subjective nature. A spiritual belief system provides for both, with faith in “the self” to know the subjective is satisfied as well. In the case of building an arch, the structure is in its most unstable state just before that last stone is placed. The whole structure is at risk for crumbling into a pile of rubble. As a person, the further you go down the spiritual path, the greater the need becomes to retreat to that which is familiar. If a person begins to back off when it gets hard, the split that has occurred may be difficult to heal. At first, in the presence of retreat each stack of stones seems strengthened; however, the columns have already become separated and cannot be rejoined as they were before. Retreat at this point is not a return to when things felt more stable.

It is more like cementing over the opening created without ever connecting the two sides in the way they were meant to be. To persist through these difficult times is to find the place where magic happens. Once you step through this opening, no return is possible. You must continue toward the light of your being or descend into madness.

Now you have reached the point of internal understanding, yet nothing outside you has changed according to this understanding. You may consider yourself to have an enlightened understanding. The internal understanding is essentially complete, while the truth of this understanding has not been represented into the world. Rumi once said; “My friends have become strangers and I’m surrounded by enemies”. You may feel ready to bring this incredible understanding to the masses. Coming to understand that the best you can do is learn how to represent what you have found within, is a growing experience which will bring a whole new level of understanding. It is a more complete level of acceptance than previously thought possible.

What has happened is that you have placed the center stone of the arch. A single stone dramatically changes the distribution of weight, making the whole structure significantly stronger. External support is no longer needed. It becomes an opening with no weakness other than the strength of the material itself. With the heart, success in traveling through “the dark night of the soul” constructs the arch, allowing the last block to find its place. Just as the load of each stone is transformed when the last stone is placed in an arch, you become completely different from when you started on the path. What you find is that you already are, all that you had hoped you were all along, and always have been.

You have reached the beginning, which is an opening in the veil between life and death. Your body becomes the structure and within, you become a doorway into the infinite. The load

of this discovery is beyond description as love is in every place you look and no place you examine. The emptiness inside represents existence within a place of possibility, while recognizing there is no story of you other than the story that unfolds with every action. You live in the moment, the past disappearing behind, the future yet to be, and the all beauty before you is a reality to behold.

How would you describe the quality of a hole in a donut or the space in an open doorway without describing the surrounding structure? You personify something in nothing and yet have an existence in the world. You represent this opening and as such have come to a place without description. No longer are you a dynamically changing self modifying machine. You have become “truth” in the true meaning of Plato’s assertion; “truth is that which does not change”. It is this last block coming into place that gives a person the ability to handle what comes, which is an unending connection with infinite love.

Congratulations, you have become enlightened! Those who have achieved do not congratulate themselves for finding that which they worked so hard to cover up. The satisfaction comes from doing the hard work to find the truth within and gain the ability to represent it into the world. Ultimately, the process is not about adding knowledge, it is about taking away complexity, until you find what you spend each day hiding from yourself. There is no doubt that it is a major accomplishment to find such a prize. Just remember when you are looking for a needle in a haystack, the solution is not to pile on more hay. The journey you take is an arduous journey that takes you far, only to return to the place you have never left. The rest of your natural life is left for growth in learning how to represent this wonderful gift of understanding into the world that created the opportunity for finding your true self.