

THE GATE OF TRUTH

by
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In the country of Katras there is a small but prosperous town, known as the 'Town of Truth'. It is so called because it began as a stopping point for pilgrims who were visiting the 'Gate of Truth', a short distance into the mountains.

Every night, it is said, the 'Gate of Truth' swings open, for just the flickering of an eye, then closes again. However, if a seeker is alert and can see through the Gate at that moment of brilliant light - ever after the Gate is open to him.

In ancient times many seekers came to sit silently before the Gate at night, and many were illuminated by the pure light of the Gate's opening. The 'Light of Truth', it was said, was more clear, more bright, than any other.

The 'Gate of Truth' was thus widely known in ancient times. A thriving industry grew up around it; the industry of supplying seekers with appropriate food, housing, and clothing for their solitary trek into the mountains. It was from this industry that the 'Town of Truth' itself grew rich.

The seekers of old times were gradually replaced by tourists, for the magnificent Gate was the only exciting feature in that otherwise rocky and foreboding country.

The tourists did not wish to visit the 'Gate of Truth' by night. The darkness made it impossible to see the elaborate and beautiful decorations for which the Gate was world famous. In addition, there always seemed to be a storm around the Gate at night, when it was reputed to open; but the days were fine. It was altogether more convenient for the town to establish a day use only policy.

Guided tours were conducted four times a day, during the season, and there were many lovely pamphlets, in full color, explaining the history of the Gate including its exceptionally beautiful artwork. There were brochures telling about the mystical significance of the ornamentation as well as post cards you could send to your friends and family at home.

Young men of the town were hired to conduct the daily tours. This was the principal source of income each season for the bright university students, who had sufficient presence to meet the public. These guides, naturally, went by the old name of 'Seeker', wearing robes which the management believed to resemble those of the original seekers.

One such 'Seeker', Lorin by name, conceived the idea of actually watching the Gate open in order to give a quality of personal experience and historical significance to his lectures for the tourists. In this way, he reasoned, he might easily be promoted to the office of 'Chief Seeker', an enviable position.

(Not only was this year round employment, at a considerable wage, but it included automatic membership in the town's Chamber of Commerce, as the principal voice of the tourist industry. Next to the city council itself the 'Chief Seeker' was probably the most respected position in the town, and a worthy goal for any young man.)

So Lorin took the ancient vow of the seeker, which was often repeated in the explanatory materials. He vowed that he would penetrate the pure truth of the Gate, at any cost. He was even prepared to sit up all night if necessary, alone. And so he went to the 'Gate of Truth' one night, by flashlight, dressed in rain gear against the famous night storms, of which he had heard. He

walked, as did the ancient seekers, using an old overgrown path which occasionally crossed the highway that had been built for the tourist busses.

It was, in truth, a little frightening at the 'Gate of Truth' after sundown. The darkness was intense, and the silence so deep it seemed more than the mere absence of sound. Invisible and silent presences seemed to surround him. In the failing light the marvelous carvings of the Gate, which he knew and explained so well, seemed to change; seemed to take on meanings that he did not remember from the pamphlets. It was not altogether an easy place to be.

Nevertheless, his determination did not waver. He settled himself beneath a tree to watch for the opening of the 'Gate of Truth'.

In a short time a cool wind began to rise making Lorin chilly. Then a light rain began to fall. It was gentle at first but it quickly became stronger. Suddenly the feeble moon disappeared behind building storm clouds. Lorin began to be alarmed. He tried to put together a little shelter of tree branches, but it was an art he knew nothing about, having lived all his young life in town, as a civilized person.

The wind grew stronger and the rain harder; all this very quickly. Lorin protected himself as best he could but it was no use. He was getting very wet and very cold, and very frightened as well. He was being forced to an inevitable conclusion. This night of storms was more than he had prepared for. It was not a night to be spending on the mountain.

A sudden flash of lighting and a heavy roll of thunder terrified him. Grabbing his flashlight he began to run back home, this time using the broad road the busses used. He ran through the driving rain, not stopping until he rounded the last bend and saw the warm, welcoming lights of the familiar town ahead.

At last, as he climbed gratefully into his own bed, he was still terribly frightened. It was not until the morning sun was radiant

across the mountains that Lorin realized that he had not once glanced at the 'Gate of Truth'.

Lorin was an intelligent young man. He analyzed his defeat with some care. His fear, he reasoned, had been the main problem. The fear was caused by two things. One, he did not have the proper equipment for such a venture. Two, he lacked the necessary skills. The obvious way to remedy this lack was to get some appropriate instruction.

In his decisive way he set about this immediately. He joined the Camping and Mountaineering Club of the university. He ordered the catalogs of all the outdoor suppliers they recommended to him as being the real thing. In time, his application to detail made him something of an expert in such affairs.

He soon knew the prices of all the equipment, what it was good for, which was best for beginners, and also for advanced practitioners. He developed his own skills to a such a great degree he was finally elected president of the outdoor club.

Lorin found a great deal of real joy in all of this. He sometimes reflected how odd it was that his new success had sprung from his desire to penetrate the 'Gate of Truth'. Though he himself had found a new life, he never forgot his original aim to penetrate the Gate, although it did seem somewhat less important by this time.

Almost a year after his original decision, Lorin realized that he now had all the skills and equipment he had so badly lacked. He had spent many nights in the wilds and he had learned to be perfectly comfortable in all sorts of weather. By now he had the very best equipment. He had an excellent light mountain tent, down jacket, sleeping bag to match, a gas lantern for light, a small portable heater for his tent, and dehydrated food. In short everything he needed. It was time to return to the Gate, this time knowing he could handle any situation that might arise.

Arriving before the 'Gate of Truth' he began to set up his camp quickly and efficiently. His tent was nearly perfect; his clothing was warm and comfortable, and his skills were quite equal to the

occasion. This time when the wind began to rise Lorin merely smiled to himself in satisfaction; it had been prepared for. The coming of the rain bothered him not at all. He was master of his own fate by now.

From time to time he left the shelter of his cozy tent, making prudent checks of the security of the camp. He carefully checked the tent stakes, tightening here, loosing there, rigging the rain fly for maximum protection; all in accordance with wind direction and intensity, as he had learned to do it.

This time the flashes of lighting and thunder nearby did not frighten him at all and he remembered with some amusement how threatening they had been only a year before. He was comfortable and not frightened all night long. It was not until the morning sun was radiant across the mountains that Lorin realized that he had not once glanced at the 'Gate of Truth'.

“Well”, thought Lorin, “technique is not everything after all. Technique without understanding and I am no closer to seeing the Gate open than before.” So he set about to acquire understanding of the meaning of the 'Gate of Truth'.

By now Lorin had realized that the brochures issued by the management were not sufficient. They were intended only for tourists and left out many important facts, for reasons of space and budget. He was mature enough to realize that without further knowledge he might not even understand what it meant when the Gate finally opened and he peered inside.

Accordingly he began careful research in the scholarly literature that had grown up around the 'Gate of Truth'. There had been much written in the past thousand years or so. Many scholars had made their name, their reputation, and living in discussion of these profound mysteries.

One work stood out over all the rest. The famous volume of over two thousand pages, Notes Toward a Possible Theory of Some Implications. The sub title read: A preliminary investigation of the

so called 'Gate of Truth' from the stand point of historical, ascetic, sociological and religious materials of correlative significance.

The author of 'Notes', as Lorin privately called it, was the most eminent scholar in all Katras. In fact he had become the most eminent scholar by writing the 'Notes'. It was truly an extraordinary work, a marvel of intellect.

Lorin's head had often swum in admiration. This single work had consumed almost forty years of the scholar's life, mostly spent in the great museums and libraries of the known world, collecting manuscripts heretofore unknown, eye witness testimony, comparing and collating, documenting and footnoting every shade of opinion that had ever been uttered concerning the 'Gate of Truth'.

It was often said in the academic trade that there was not a single thing in all the two thousand pages that was not a scientific fact. So magnificently objective was this great man that he had never laid eyes on the 'Gate of Truth' himself; fearing that some stray subjective impression might distort his clear view. Instead he worked entirely from a series of incredibly detailed, high resolution photographs, taken by a professional photographer who specialized in religious monuments.

Reading 'Notes' often discouraged Lorin. His own undertaking seemed pitifully unimportant compared to the industry and intellect of the great scholar. Still, he reminded himself, he was not aspiring to that kind of greatness, he merely wanted a brief glimpse of luminous truth itself, in order to advance himself in his own humble profession.

This staggering and bulky document had become Lorin's bible and he took it with him the next time he went to his vigil at the 'Gate of Truth'. Not to be caught again, Lorin pinned back the tent flap so that the Gate would remain in clear view throughout the night; he would not make that mistake twice.

He arranged his gas lantern to shed its bright light on 'Notes' and settled down, plunging immediately into this deepest profundity

of the human intellect. In it he found the design motifs of the Gate traced all the way back to ancient China, with Greek and Babylonian elements creeping in. There were veiled suggestions about an antique Islamic mystical cult. The architecture of the Gate was examined in the most profound way imaginable, with precise measurements and graphs of stress under varying wind conditions.

Perhaps the most interesting chapters, to Lorin at least, were those comparing the myth of the 'Seekers' with similar illumination myths throughout the world. There was much that was similar in all of them. Lorin found himself wondering, once again, whether diffusionism or the doctrine of independent discovery offered the most satisfactory answer.

The nightly storm came and went almost unnoticed. so deep was Lorin's absorption in the book. There is an endless fascination in the scholarly search for Truth.

"Indeed", thought Lorin, "the scholar is truly a seeker, after his own fashion. But one who did not rely on mere experience." It was not until the morning sun was radiant across the mountains that Lorin reali

ed that, once again, he had not once glanced at the 'Gate of Truth'. He had been completely absorbed in research about the Gate.

By this time Lorin himself had come to be considered an expert on the 'Gate of Truth'. His standing in the community had steadily risen through his own efforts, which were generally considered to be on behalf of the tourist industry as a whole.

Not in human memory had any local person devoted so much time, preparation, and simple energy in seeking to solve the great riddle.

Lorin had conquered fear. He knew more about the necessary equipment than anyone else. He had read so widely in the literature that some claimed he knew more about the 'Gate of Truth' than any other living scholar; the writer of the 'Notes'

having died and been buried in his scholarly robes some time since. Among those who knew, it was considered nearly certain that Lorin would soon receive the handsome patch-work robe of 'Chief Seeker'; he was unquestionably the best qualified man in the community to wear it.

Of late, however, these rumors of his promotion had dwindled steadily and understandably, for a change seemed to be possessing young Lorin. To speak frankly, there were those in the town who quite openly whispered their suspicions that Lorin was, well, mad.

He was, they said, becoming quite obsessive in his preoccupation with the actual opening of the Gate, which was at the very best a very old and very dusty tale. To have conquered his fear was admirable; everybody admitted that much freely. To learn the necessary skills was admirable. To steep himself in the scholarship of the Gate was admirable.

These were all perfectly respectable human accomplishments without this crazy insistence on actually seeing the Gate open. The opening was only myth anyway, they said; that much having been proven scientifically in 'Notes' by comparison with similar myths around the world.

Lorin, they said, should settle down with his more than considerable accomplishments and become a useful and profitable citizen of the 'Town of Truth'. And it must be admitted there was much truth in what the townspeople said.

Lorin was, even to the most sympathetic observer, becoming extreme in his ways. Every night now he went up to the 'Gate of Truth' determined once again to keep his mind and attention firmly fixed, so that when it opened he would not miss it.

But each night something went wrong. He was distracted, or he couldn't concentrate, or he drowsed off from the warmth of his tent; though he still kept the flap open.

He began to feel that the whole vigil was insane -- just as the town's people had often told him before they ceased to speak to him entirely.

He was eventually asked to leave the university.

At last even his job as part time 'Seeker' was taken from him and given to a bright young man who took better care of his appearance. Tourists had complained that Lorin often talked quite madly about the Gate; frightening their children who were not accustomed to such as he.

Once started downhill, Lorin's situation deteriorated with amazing speed. He soon found he had lost not only the respect of the town he had lately gained, but had lost his only means of livelihood. His small savings dwindled away to nothing so he began to sell his possessions in order to have enough to eat.

He did not mind this excessively. He was not attached to his possessions in the way of the town's people. In fact he felt he needed very little indeed. The only things that were important to him were the things he needed for his nightly vigil, through the storm, in front of the 'Gate of Truth'. Soon these few essentials were all he had left.

Of these, he sold first the lantern, reasoning that since he no longer read the notes at night he needed no special light. Then he sold his sturdy, fine mountain tent; the very tent that had kept him dry and secure through the eternal storms. Still, it was not intolerable. His down jacket kept him comfortably warm. He realized he had not needed quite as much as he had thought to remain comfortable.

Night after night he sat. Night after night he fell asleep, curled snugly in his sleeping bag and down jacket. Money from the tent lasted quite a while for it was of the finest quality available, but eventually that too was gone. Lorin sold his jacket and his sleeping bag.

He was a mysterious figure now, wild eyed, wrapped up in an old tattered robe he had patched together. His previous life seemed like a dream with its well ordered corridors, its logic, and its comfort. He could scarcely remember how it had been then, for he was no longer comfortable as he sat before the Gate. The wind ruffled his long, unkempt hair, the rain soaked his laughable robe and he ached from the cold of it. Worst of all, the thunder and lightning frightened him again, driving everything from his mind in terror.

He did not know what was happening to him. He did not know what to expect from the future. Regardless of his preparations, regardless of his studies, he had never seen the opening of the 'Gate of Truth'. He was almost convinced that the town's people were right, that the Gate never opened at all.

The only reason he kept on was that there was nothing else to do.

He had lost his prestige, his possessions; worst of all he had lost his own image of himself. They called him the 'Mad Seeker', and whispered that he was sometimes not even certain of who he was. In addition he felt terrible guilt, for he had long since forgotten almost every thing he had ever read about the Gate, even the priceless scientific facts of the 'Notes'.

One night as he huddled miserably, drowsing before the Gate, the storm grew worse than he had ever seen. Torrents of chilling rain came sweeping out of the blackness and the wind whipped at his clothing. His robe seemed no protection at all, and it weighed tons. It was all quite useless, and his mind was empty of everything. Unthinking he threw off his robe and felt the pelting rain on his very skin.

And so it was that 'Lorin the Seeker' was standing, naked, awake, and possessing nothing when the 'Gate of Truth' opened; flooding him with its Light.