

## THE BOAT OF NAAM

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*This talk was given in Hindi at Kirpal Ashram on Thursday, September 7, 1978 during the time of the disastrous floods which had affected many parts of India.*

These days we are suffering unprecedented floods in some parts of Delhi and in many parts of the country. Within minutes, countless homes have been darkened, and news is coming in giving appalling details of the countless people who have been drowned. The government issued warnings of the impending disaster. They gave these warnings at various places and asked the people to take adequate measures, as it was known that the great flood was coming. The government said very clearly that the quickly rising flood water could become a major danger; there could be terrifying whirlpools with poisonous snakes and many other hazards following in its wake, and if the people did not take heed at once they would become the victims of the fury of the flood.

Now we find that those who heeded these warnings and moved to safe ground are secure; their houses may be damaged or even totally destroyed, but they themselves are safe. Those who did not heed the warnings have been drowned or find themselves in great difficulties, having lost their property and having been gripped by fever or disease. This great flood has already caused much havoc and, as time passes, we shall undoubtedly learn of many more misfortunes, the damage and destruction which will inevitably follow in its wake.

In the same way, we too have to search for some safe ground for ourselves, a place which is undisturbed by the turbulent twists of nature. It must be a place free from the turmoil of this world. It must be a place free from the material problems of this physical existence; it must be free from the vulnerability of the human body with all its many complexities. We have to find such a place which offers peace, harmony and welfare to everyone. The happiness we shall enjoy there, is of course, unlike any fleeting happiness we may encounter in this sad world. The happiness of that place is totally unaffected by any change of climate or the fury of nature; it is not subject to moods or time. That is the happiness which is eternal and knows no change.

Just as the government warned us against the impending flood and its danger, so a higher government warns us of the impending tragedy of our worldly life. Divine teachers are sent to arouse mankind and alert them to the dangers. They come to tell us that we have attained human birth, which is itself a rare privilege, and having been granted the boon of human existence we have reached the high point on the wheel of life - the round of transmigration. They exhort us to seek refuge in the protective fold of a divine boatman who can safely ferry us across the turmoil and catastrophes of this earth life. There is no time to be lost; every moment, every second is precious. These divine saviors come to serve us; they charge no fees; they ask nothing of us but to listen to their warnings and sail with them to eternal safety. But we hardly listen to their pleas although we know in our heart of hearts that this is the only way to attain permanent peace, permanent contentment, permanent salvation.

What is the ultimate outcome of this folly? We have been helplessly watching the distress of the people who did not heed the government's warnings about the coming flood. Just as those who disregarded those urgent warnings have been swept away and their bodies now float on the

raging waters, so are our lives caught in a mad whirl of earthly activities and are being wasted - destroyed - on the high floods of maya, illusion. Our lives are rushing towards their end without bearing fruit as we lose the opportunity for salvation offered us by the divine boatman who is searching for us - pleading with us - to enter his unsinkable boat: the boat of Naam.

Some of you present have seen the flooded areas. Some of you have been to Model Town, which is so nearby, and you may have visited other affected places. You have seen how the government has sent out special boats and how those victims who availed themselves of such boats have been brought to safety. So many boats are still plying the waters, looking for survivors; they are all government boats. Have you come across any marooned family that managed to escape by using its own boat? Who keeps a boat in the middle of a city? Only those who entrusted themselves to the assistance offered by the government were able to save their lives and some of their precious belongings.

So we, too, have to reach beyond the limits of the flood of time; we have to find a place where the lord of death has no power and where his agents cannot trap us. But who can reach this haven of safety? Only those rare ones who have found a master boatman able to row them across the treacherous waters of the flood. Any individual who thinks he can make this journey on his own is sadly mistaken. We all need the assistance of an expert boatman, the divine boatman who knows all about the eddies, whirlpools and other hazards. The savior has been sent by the higher government and is aware of the treachery of the furious waters. Only such a one can ensure that we reach our cherished goal.

Nature is seeking to teach us by every means at its command. Every living leaf in this world seeks to put across a moral to us. But because of our indifference, because of our abandonment to attachment and illusion, we find that even these drastic flood waters cannot waken us to the vulnerable plight we are in. We strive so hard to possess all sorts of conveniences to make our lives pleasanter, easier; they break, we tire of them, we lose them. What we treasured yesterday, today has little meaning, or causes much pain. We struggle from one disappointment to another, but we still procrastinate. When it is time for meditation, we put it off for the next day. We think that everything will wait for us. When we are students we tell ourselves we will engage in the spiritual practices after we have completed our exams. When we have passed the exams we say we will take up the instructions of the Guru in all seriousness after we have found a job. When the job has been found, then we want to wait till after marriage. Our spiritual practices go on being endlessly postponed.

In the sacred city of Benares, Kabir Sahib used to visit a man who liked to pass his day sitting in his garden. Kabir urged him to better spend his time improving himself in his spiritual practices. At first he replied, "My children are still young; I will turn to the devotion of God when they are grown up." Years later, Kabir asked the man, "Dear friend, you surely must be enjoying your practices now?" The man replied, "You see, I am waiting for all my children to be married; then I will devote myself entirely to meditation." Later, when Kabir went to visit the man again, he asked, "Now that all your children are married, how fortunate you are. Are you really spending all your time in meditation?" The reply was, "Not yet because I am so keen to see my grandchildren grow up and get settled." Some years later when Kabir went to see his friend, he was told that the man had died. Kabir, turning to the grandchildren, said, "That poor man wasted his whole life in this garden listening to the orders of his worldly mind."

The followers of this material world always find some excuse or other to put off doing their spiritual practices. In India, I find that as the responsibilities of life increase and get the better of

us, we are happy to tell ourselves, "Our elders divided the earthly sojourn into four parts, and it was right. When we, too, reach maturity and enter the fourth part, *Vanaprastha*, which is total retirement from all worldly activities, we will take up our spiritual practices in full earnestness." But which of us really knows if he will reach the age of *Vanaprastha*? Who knows, like the victims of the flood, if the world will end for us this very night? The life that has been given us is fickle indeed; who can say when it will give us the slip!

I have just come directly from my office, and I am now addressing you. But can I be certain that I will be able to speak the next words I have in mind? People have been known to die in the middle of a sentence. It is for this reason that the saints have always stressed that we must give up our habit of putting off our work until tomorrow. Our Beloved Master Sant Kirpal Singh used to say, "Procrastination is the thief of time." But we do not care to listen to the divine teachers. They tell us repeatedly that what we mean to do tomorrow should be done today, and what we plan to do today should be done here and now. But instead of listening to them, we go on carelessly wasting the precious life that has been given to us.

Those of you who worked with Sant Kirpal Singh - those who had the privilege to work for him - will remember how he would ask people to finish a particular job they had in hand. He never permitted them to leave it until the next day. He would stress that he wanted the work finished that very day: "Finish something daily," he would say. Because we did not take heed of what he said, many of us are filled with shame and sorrow. How often did he tell us, "Do what I tell you here and now; how long will you have this voice among you to exhort you in this fashion?"

One of my colleagues was relating how at night he heard the warning given about the flood; such warnings kept coming, but he thought that he and his family could wait until the morning to move to safer ground and be able to take all their precious belongings with them. They all went to bed. At ten o'clock at night the raging flood waters arrived. The water rose rapidly and was soon head high. When my friend tried to open the front door it would not open because of the pressure from the water. Fortunately for them, the son of the gardener came and managed to pull the door open with a pole. In that way, in the dead of night, they escaped from drowning. But as for their belongings, they have no news of them whatsoever! In moments, people are swept away; they lose their lives. And in the same way, we lose the precious span of time that has been given to us. Instead of devoting ourselves to the worship of the Father, so as to become reunited with Him, we lose ourselves in the false security of the world and worship material things.

We should learn from everything that happens. Maharaj Ji used to say, "When you are moving about, have your ears and eyes open." Nature is seeking to teach us through every little piece of straw. If vibrations from her dancing fingers can touch the strings of the heart, we should throb to her divine music and it will awaken us from our long slumber. If anyone, indeed, can touch the strings of our heart, it is a realized one, a perfect Master. He knows the inmost depths of the heart, the inmost depths of the soul. He knows the subtlest of the subtle, and he alone can help us to become attuned to the Music of the Universe. This magical Sound cannot be heard by everyone. Ordinary mortals are deaf to that inner Music, for it is only the divine teacher who can give us the boost so that we may respond to its mysterious call. I have written a verse which runs:

*All glory to the Beloved who has broken my heart!  
In the silence of the night, there is the sound of its breaking.*

Even the breaking of a heart has its own sound, and it is audible to those who have the ear.

We have to learn to hear the resounding Music - the Music of the Creator. We have to learn to hear its unending melody. In that way we can learn to awaken from the lethargic sleep we have fallen into - the slumber of illusion and false security. And only he can awaken us who is himself liberated from all illusion and false security, for he has been made by the higher government the focal point where the lifeline of the Eternal Music is flowing, drawing us to the promised land. That divine boatman is transmitting freely the rapturous Music of the Shabd, the holy Word, the sacred Naam. That Music will resound forever. The transmitter is the Word made flesh. He has been sent to pour over our parched souls the life-enhancing Harmony of All-harmonies. It is the Music of the Spheres, the Comforter, the Voice of the Silence. It is calling us to jump into the boat of Naam.

It is not enough to sympathize with the victims of these floods; we have to give them practical help. Whatever we do for them is not enough; we must still do more. But seeing their terrible plight we must also learn a lesson: life is far too short and too precious to waste; from now on we must make the best use of every moment that has been given to us. We should all take a vow never again to squander even a second but to be ever at his door, the door of the Beloved, the door of the Master. He is so generous, so loving, so forgiving. If we but turn our faces towards him in full faith, he is willing to give us his spiritual treasures. If we reach his door, we may be certain that he will ensure our liberation from this constant round of transmigration.

Just as in the case of these flood waters where there are eddies, whirlpools and dangerous creatures lying in wait for us, likewise riding on the spiritual waters there is many a threat, many a hazard, many a disappointment. A perfect Master is aware of every possible danger on the way. He has overcome them himself. He can also steer us through the stormiest sea and enable us to reach the haven of safety, the haven of peace, the haven of contentment which knows no change. The great Hazur Baba Sawan Singh Ji was once asked to describe this region; he said very simply, "It is the place of unchanging permanence."

Come, let us now at least begin; let us now attend to the warning voice of nature and to the voices of those who have suffered in the calamity of this flood. Let it be a poignant warning to us to put "God first, and the world next!" He who has a sensitive heart cannot but listen to this warning voice. The Beloved's chosen ones cannot ignore the Beloved's pleas any longer. How long can we expect him to sing out the call to abandon our shaky, unsound foothold on the shifting sands of illusion and plunge into the divine boat of Naam?

Yes, there are many who will be deaf, totally deaf to this Celestial Music because they have entrenched themselves in lust, attachment and greed. They will be unable to hear this Music. I know we can hardly describe ourselves as the Beloved's chosen ones because we have been blessed by taking refuge at the feet of a living Godman. A living embodiment of the holy Word is perfect in heart himself, and it is his grace to make anyone who comes to him his own. It is true that because of this great capacity - the extent of which we are little aware - with one glance of grace he can transform the most unworthy, the most hopeless into his own image. Spiritual sensitivity is dormant in everyone; it is dormant like an ember covered by ash. But when the wind blows on it, once again it comes into its own, and glows with full strength. And so we are, indeed, the divine Beloved's chosen ones, for are we not like spent embers languishing in the filth hoping that he will blow upon us so that we may reflect his pure Light and glory? It is only the ash of material illusion which has covered the spiritual fire within us. It is the law of nature that arranges an opportunity for the divine teacher to come and blow away the stultifying ash which is smothering us.

What do we not owe in gratitude to the Beloved Master? Has he not saved us from the misery of this flood? Even those satsangis who were caught in the rising waters have been uplifted by his far-reaching hand and the assurance of his protection. Comforted in this knowledge, they knew no fear, no anxiety. They were able to face such trials and tribulations in the fullness of spiritual intoxication. We were all once drowning in the sea of maya, yet he accepted us, is caring for us and has safely placed us in the boat of Naam. It is for us to take the full benefit of this refuge. Has he not bestowed on us the priceless treasure of initiation into the Mysteries of the Beyond?

The greater part of the life that has been given us, the precious moments allotted us, have been squandered in the graveyard of time. In the fleeting moments that are left, it is incumbent upon us to redeem ourselves and turn them into eternity so as to win back the glory of the timeless. It is for us to use whatever time is left to reach the ultimate goal of human existence - the goal of self-realization and God-realization through contacting the unchanging permanence of Naam. The Master, through his glance of mercy and compassion, offers this boon, and we, by accepting it, place salvation within our grasp.

Come now, let us pledge ourselves to serve those brothers and sisters who have suffered in this disaster and do our best for them. But let us also make a pledge that from now on, for whatever life that remains, we will not waste even a precious moment. As I have just said, who knows when life will betray us, when the last moment will come? Let us pay heed to the repeated injunction of the Beloved Master - the advice he gave us as his very own children - the advice to attend seriously to our spiritual practices. "Who knows," he would say, "when this voice will be silenced? Listen to me while there is still time. You alone have to do this work; no one else can do it for you. Begin today. Begin now, this very moment!"

Let us also promise to sin no more. In Hazur's days, if any dear one stood up during satsang and confessed that he had sinned, Hazur would turn to those present and ask if anyone was willing to shoulder the man's burden? When no one answered - for who can carry another man's burden when he cannot even carry his own? - the great Hazur would roar forth like a lion, "What is done is done; but never repeat your sin again!" So let us determine not to repeat any of our sins and errors. Time, tide and death wait for no man. Whatever time is lost is lost forever. At least we can now make sure that we make the most of what remains.

It is for us to shape our way of life according to the divine teachings of the Beloved who came to rescue us; we should maintain the self-introspection diary without sparing ourselves, for this is the way - the only way, I would say - to cultivate the virtues of humility, purity of heart, chastity, detachment and love for all living creatures. If we can do this, we will never find ourselves in distress, anxiety or apprehension. We will surely see the hand of God behind all that is happening, and we will see it for our betterment.

So now, let us launch forth with all passion and zeal towards our spiritual salvation, our spiritual enlightenment. If we engage in regular meditation, take to the pure life, and sail in the Beloved's boat of Naam, we will not only meet all our worldly obligations and responsibilities, but gain the blessings - the visa - to enter the Beyond. This is my prayer, my exhortation to you all this day.