

THE PREDICAMENT OF MAN

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The following talk was given on November 9, 1978 at Kirpal Ashram. Delhi, India.

Khawaja Hafiz, the great Persian Sufi, paints a vivid picture in the following verses, of the strange ways of God and of man's helplessness:

*Man has been tied hand and foot to a plank
And released on a stormy sea with the injunction that he must
not allow a drop of water to wet his garments.*

Indeed, we have been tied to a plank and abandoned on the waves of the high sea. Such is the condition of our helplessness. This verse is a complaint against God's justice and also explains our condition. The soul yearns to be united with the Lord, but however much it endeavors it is unable to make the least progress. The words of Hafiz embody the cry of the soul. Man finds himself helpless on the high waves of the world and yet is required, as it floats among them, not to allow even a drop of worldliness to soil his garments. How difficult, how impossible, to fulfill such a commandment! We are all caught in the web of illusion, enslaved to the senses and the mind. The soul has become so identified with the mind that it does not even recognize itself. It thinks of itself as the body, not independent of it.

*The need for food and sleep, and the desires of the flesh, tie
us to the body through a thousand temptations.*

Shastras

The cause of our enslavement is the mind which is always in search of leisure, pleasure and indulgence. It is always tempted to simultaneously seek all the pleasures of this world, and is never satisfied with any of them. Such is the state of our delusion in this world. Our senses draw us to the world outside. If the eye beholds a beautiful object we are attracted to it. But the physical beauty that we see, the beauty of the human body, the beauty of flowers, trees, rivers and mountains, is not the true beauty. It is only ephemeral. Real beauty resides within; it is that infinite principle which is at the heart of each and every object of creation.

The Beloved Master, Sant Kirpal Singh, used to tell us that even one of our senses, if it becomes dominant, is sufficient to destroy us. The moth is dominated by the sense of sight and through its eye is drawn to the flame. When it sees the candlelight it flies into the flame and is destroyed. In like fashion, the sense of hearing reduces even the most poisonous snakes to helplessness and slavery. The cobra, whose sight frightens men to death, is reduced to servitude through the music of the snake charmer's pipe. The deer is the fastest, freest of animals, and is swift enough to fly from the leopard and tiger. But upon hearing the drum it is relentlessly drawn to it, and allows itself to become a captive spending the rest of its days in the confines of a zoo or a private garden. The fish falls an easy prey to its palate. It may roam the river at will, but when the angler casts his baited hook, it unsuspectingly swallows the bait, and loses its life.

Each of our senses is a source of great temptation. One of the mightiest creatures is the elephant. It is so large and massive it can uproot trees. Yet, it has one weakness - it is blind in the pursuit of its lust. Those who wish to trap an elephant dig a large pit and cover it with twigs, branches and loose earth. After they have camouflaged the pit, they erect a large effigy of a she-elephant. When the male is overcome with desire for his counterpart he rushes towards her and falls headlong into the pit. He is left there, unable to escape for days on end. In this fashion, through hunger, he is tamed and finally domesticated. As sexual desire is to the elephant, the sense of smell is to the bumblebee. It can bore through the hardest of wood, and yet its love of fragrance causes it to be entrapped in a flower and die. Citing these examples, Sant Kirpal Singh used to tell us that if even a single sense can lead the most powerful creatures to slavery and death, how vulnerable is man, in whom all the senses are highly developed.

Khawaja Hafiz in his verses is making an impassioned plea to God. He is drawing attention to the countless temptations to which man is subject and to the impossibility of God's injunction that man keeps himself free from the soiling touch of this world. The sea is always full of waves. Anyone who has stood by the sea and watched the great waves lashing the shore at the time of high tide, knows how such waves can pull down or topple over anything. Caught on such waters is it possible for anyone to escape their spray, to remain dry in their midst? It is natural that the clothes of such a one will be drenched.

My poetry teacher, Hazrat Shamim Karhani, in one of his poems has said, "On one hand our Maker demands that we adhere to the path of righteousness, and on the other hand he has beset the way with every possible temptation." As we live out our lives, as we tread the way, we are constantly dogged with the fear of slipping and of falling into temptation. Strange indeed are His ways; strange is the paradox of life. We are promised immortality if we can keep to the right path, and yet at every step we are subject to desires and temptations. Caught in this paradox we are reduced to a state of helplessness. However hard we labor, however sincerely we yearn to return to our Creator, we are compelled to realize our own helplessness, the impossibility of our situation. Hafiz shows this state of helplessness by picturing man as a creature bound to a plank. He has been tied hand and foot and head. He is not free to move any limb. Roped to a plank he is cast away on the sea. Each wave that comes along threatens to engulf him, and yet as he floats helplessly on the sea he is required to keep himself completely dry. Is it possible? Is it just? Can he indeed keep himself above all the temptations that surround him? However hard he may labor to keep himself pure, to keep above temptations, can he really do so? As a poet has said, "We are not angels; and as men we cannot but err."

When a soul realizes the impossibility of its plight, it begins protesting God's justice. It cries out to the Lord to ask Him why it has been placed in this impossible predicament. How, he questions, in the midst of so many temptations and snares, in the midst of such sweeping tidal waves can it keep itself dry? As it realizes its own helplessness, its own incapability to protect itself and keep itself dry, this protest turns into a prayer. The soul, realizing its own vulnerability and helplessness, prays to its Creator for His help, for without Him it can accomplish nothing. Its own strength cannot lead it to salvation. There is only one way, one answer to its problem - the assistance and refuge of the Lord. It prays to Him to come to its rescue and save it from certain destruction. God alone can protect it and keep its garments dry.

When such a cry issues from the heart, from the inmost depths of the soul, it goes straight to the Lord, for God cannot but hear the cry of the soul. Guru Gobind Singh has said the Lord, before he listens to the trumpeting of the elephant, hears the cry of the ant if that cry issues from its heart.

Realizing its own helplessness the soul cries out to the Lord: "I have tried everything, I have strained my strength to the utmost, but to no avail. I have sought to pursue the path of good actions. I have read the scriptures and performed various rites and rituals. I have fasted and I have been on pilgrimages. I have visited Amarnath, Gaya, Banares, and Jerusalem. But though I have done all this, I find myself helpless in the task of returning to You. I am unable to take a step towards the goal which lies within. My friends, relatives and neighbors are of no avail, for the moment I am faced by a strong temptation I am helpless. Its high waves sweep over me and engulf me. I have not spared any efforts; I have worked hard and worked with sincerity. And yet for all this, I am unable to move forward even an inch. I am unable to protect myself from temptation; I am not strong enough. Lord, unless You come to my aid, unless You protect and succour me, I am nothing."

When such a cry bursts from the soul, God hears it and heeds it. Once this yearning to be united with God has filled our hearts, we are in perpetual anguish, in perpetual realization of our own helplessness. The Lord cannot but heed this call of the anguished soul.

Recently I went to the West where I visited the United States of America, and Canada. There is such affluence there. Even the young boys and girls have cars for their own use. The houses are air-conditioned and every conceivable physical comfort is available. In spite of all this material wealth and prosperity, are they happy? They have a strange feeling that in acquiring all this wealth, they have missed out on the true spirit of living.

Sant Kirpal Singh Ji used to explain this paradox with great clarity. He would tell us that worldly wealth, comforts and relations all belong to the material realm. The soul is a conscious entity. Material assets may provide rest and comfort to the body, but by themselves they cannot bring any fulfillment to the soul which is a conscious entity. The soul can find fulfillment only in the Lord who is the ocean of all-consciousness, the source from which the soul itself has come. You may possess all the treasures of the world, you may have the thickest carpets and richest tapestries spread before you to tread upon, you may have cars and airplanes beyond number, you may have rule over men, but all these cannot give you even an iota of lasting pleasure. They belong to the material world. Inner turmoil and discontent can only be stilled if we come in contact with one who has merged with the ocean of all-consciousness, with a Master who has become one with the Lord. Such a Master can bestow on us the gift of his own enhanced consciousness. Beginning with such a gift, the soul progresses and expands its consciousness stage by stage. As this consciousness expands it finally becomes one with the ocean of all-consciousness and learns of a bliss and peace which has no limits, which is eternal.

When the soul, realizing its own helplessness, cries out in anguish, the Lord hears its cry and moves to answer it. When we surrender ourselves completely to His protection, accepting our own vulnerability, He takes charge of us. Taking the rags of the human body He comes down among us to help us return to our home. The Arabic word for God, "Khuda", literally means, "He who comes on His own." God Himself does come in the form of Godmen. They come on their own for our salvation. They are embodiments of the Absolute, the Supreme Father. They are God made flesh, and are human mouthpieces of the Lord. Many have called themselves gurus, but the true Masters are rare. We only have to look at history to see how few there are. Generally we find that at any given time the Lord works through a single human pole. While there may be more than one, such exceptions are rare.

Strange indeed are the ways of God. He may come and dwell among us, eat and drink with us, sleep with us, play with us. But unless he himself gives us the vision, we are unable to

recognize him. In one of my early verses I have said:

*I see in this human frame the glory of God;
And yet I am puzzled, for this glory is invisible.*

That is why when the saints and Masters come amidst us not everyone recognizes them. What a paradox that the Supreme Creator, the Lord of this world and the next comes and lives amongst us and none but those to whom he bequeaths sensitivity can recognize him. It is for this reason that the Sufis say that love first emanates from the heart of the Beloved. Unless the Master takes compassion on us and fills us with his love, we cannot come to his feet. Many are those who see them, many who behold them, but it is only the few to whom he reveals his true greatness. Even when an official visits our area, we stand forth and salute him. When the governor, the prime minister or the president comes our way the whole world is there to greet and applaud them. And yet when the Supreme Creator walks among us, He can pass by without any of us recognizing Him. As Jesus once said to his disciples: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me... I am in the Father and the Father is in me." But man is not really to blame for this inability to see. By himself he is helpless. "Some hearts are reserved for the play of love; that music cannot be played on every instrument." It is only the blessed few on whom the Lord has mercy and casts His glance of grace, who have the power to perceive Him. The rest of the world proceeds unseeing on its unhappy ways. "O Nanak, those eyes are different with which one sees the Lord."

How blessed we are. In ourselves we are blind, but it is the grace of the Beloved Master that he chose to call us to his own feet. And calling us to himself, he has bestowed on us that treasure whereby we can be liberated from all woe and suffering, that treasure by which we can transcend body-consciousness, that treasure through which we can reach our ultimate goal. He has given us that wealth whereby while living in this ephemeral world we become immortal, while living in this world of time we taste of the eternal. When God assumes flesh and comes among us, he calls to His own feet those who are full of anguish and who yearn for Him. He bestows upon them the link with the inner Light and Sound at the time of initiation. Thereafter, stage by stage, he helps them to transcend the body. He first merges them in his own radiant form within, and thereafter guides them plane by plane until he brings them into the presence of the Supreme Creator and merges them into His being.

His grace has been boundless, but what a shame we do not even recognize the great gift he has given us. If we were to awaken to what he has done for us, to the great riches he has bestowed on us, we would be singing the Lord's praises day and night. We would be obeying his each and every commandment. Every breath we breathe would be a breath of gratitude, of thankfulness for what the Lord has done for us. The Supreme Master, the Lord of all beauty, of all loveliness, has deemed to cast his glance of bliss, his glance of grace upon us who are ugly and misshapen. We have no value in ourselves, the value rests in him. What need he do with creatures like us? But he has accepted us as his own, worthless as we are. We need to be grateful for this, grateful every moment of our lives. In addition, we need to pray to him to give us the strength to carry out his commandments. The key to the realms within is in his hands. Let us pray to him to take us within and lead us to our ultimate goal. May he give us the strength to proceed from plane to plane, from region to region, until we stand in the presence of the Lord, and having reached the Lord may we merge into His being and become one with Him.

We have been separated from our Father since time immemorial. Through the grace of the Master we can at last become one with Him and attain eternal bliss. Becoming one with Him, we can bring to an end our age old pains, our age old anguish, our age old yearning. Let us surrender ourselves to the Masters, to Param Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj, to Hazur Baba Sawan Singh Ji Maharaj, who have brought us the gift of spirituality, for without the help of the Master we are nothing. We lack the strength to proceed on our own. Unless the Lord reaches out to us we cannot go even a step towards Him. Let us surrender ourselves completely to the Master. Let us think of nothing but the Master and do nothing but his commandments, until one day we merge in him and into the Supreme Father.

We are indeed fortunate to have been accepted, to have been given the call by the Master. It is now for us to make the best use of the gift we have been given. We are all here to attend the satsang, but how many of us even when we come to satsang, really live by what the Master says? We may understand what he says and agree with it, but it is so hard to live by what he says. When we go to a funeral we are confronted with death. For the moments that we are there we recognize the inevitability of death and are moved by it. But such is the force of worldly relationships, that once we return home we forget and become lost in our worldly ways once again. Likewise when we come to the satsang and hear the eternal wisdom, however moved we may be at the time, we fail to live and act by it when we leave the precincts of the satsang area. We go back and act as though we are totally ignorant of our ultimate goal and of our obligation to pursue it. It is not enough to come to the satsang. It is not enough to understand what the Master says. What is needed is that we translate it into our daily life, that we live by what the Master teaches us.

Hafiz says that by ourselves we are nothing; we are helpless. Such are the tidal waves of life, that in their midst we cannot keep our garments from becoming saturated with brine. Only the Lord's grace can keep us from soiling our garments. We are fortunate that the Master has called us to himself. It is now for us to shape our lives according to his commandments and thereby attain bliss everlasting. This world is full of sorrow and we are blessed in being shown the way to the eternal home. "O Nanak, this world is in perpetual sorrow. Those only are blessed who are anchored in Naam."

How can we become anchored in Naam or the Word? We can do so only when the Word itself assumes flesh and comes amongst us, and bestows upon us the gift of Naam. What a great blessing that, seeing the helplessness of man, the Lord should come among us and bestow his riches upon us. It is now for us to take mercy upon ourselves by following his commandments. By doing so and reshaping our lives, we can reap the reward and return to our home. What helplessness was ours, what frustration! There seemed to be no answer, no help, no protection, no refuge. At that time the Lord called us to Himself. At that time the Lord assumed these mortal rags for our sake and called us to Himself. If we could recognize even a fraction of what God has done for us, we would be filled with such infinite gratitude that we would live by His commandments, overcome all our problems, and merge back with our Creator.