

Life of Osho

by

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Part One

1

The Burning Ghat

We burned Osho's body at night, at the old burning *ghat*, the one down by the river.

The bit I remember most clearly is walking with the body down the road. Because Asha and I were among the last to arrive at the ashram we were packed in right at the back; so when they brought the body out by the side we were among the first to leave, and found ourselves at the very head of the procession.

We walked through the marble gates and out into Koregaon Park.

That particular road, the one leading to the ashram, had always made me think of an English country lane, and in the dark it seemed even more to have the overgrown, shuttered-

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in quality of an English hedgerow. The night was cold, the moon was down, yet somehow everything was bathed in silver light – the trees, the bougainvillea, the pale road. Perhaps it was a reflection from all the white robes.

Asha and I were walking right next to the body.

For years I had said I couldn't tell what I really felt about Osho, not unless I could get close to him physically once again. Well, there I was;- I couldn't have been much closer, I was wandering along down the road beside him... I'd only made it under the wire. My head was still full of the crazy taxi ride from Bombay, up through the mountains in the middle of the night. They call the mountains there *ghats* too, the Western Ghats, the word just means steps or a stair; and the road is one of the main trucking routes to and from Bombay. In the taxi headlights there seemed to be overturned trucks on every hairpin bend. It looked like footage of a war zone... I still hadn't got over the shock of hearing about Vivek. Her body had been found in a Bombay hotel room – dead from a drug overdose. Whether it was an accident or whether she had deliberately killed herself no one knew. Someone said she had been murdered. Vivek! How could Vivek be dead? It didn't seem possible. In the old days I think all of us had been half in love with Vivek... "Death comes dancing" Osho had said once, in a famous rap. But I didn't think Death had come dancing to Vivek – I didn't get the feeling it had been like that at all. There had been a cover-up at the ashram. They had taken her body to the burning ghat, the same way we

The Burning Ghat

were going now, just a month before. Only they had taken it secretly, in an ambulance, and in the middle of the night.

I looked at Osho as I walked beside him. His face looked grey and waxy in the half-light. He had told his doctor he wanted to wear his hat and his socks when he was burned, he had been very particular about it. Across his body lay masses of roses, grey and silver in the light, and some other flowers I could not recognise. His face looked drawn – much, much older than I remembered him, and he seemed smaller. He must have been, I realised suddenly, in great physical pain those last years. How bad had it been? He had never said anything about it. Suddenly I felt awful, like I was sick to the stomach and, falling back, let the bier bob away ahead of me. What had he really died of?

We turned at the end of the lane and began to walk out of Koregaon Park.

The glare and din coming from the main road became more pronounced now. So much had the procession swelled that it stretched right across the road and we had to walk over that heap of rotting garbage the locals always kept to one side there; I could feel it slipping and giving way under my flip-flops, I thought my foot was going to go right into it; that was bad stuff, even the crows and pie-dogs wouldn't touch it. Then we were under the great banyans lining the main road.

Dusty roots hung down above the madness. Trucks, it was mostly trucks. Beat-up trucks, just in from the Deccan,

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heading on down through the mountains to Bombay. Buses, taxis, motorbike rickshaws, scooters, bicycles, buffalo carts. People on foot dodging in and out of it, and all around us the way India juxtaposes different cultures and centuries – all incompatible and yet intact and somehow functioning simultaneously, the way things function in a dream. Ragged silhouettes on bicycles, rickshaw *wallahs* darting in and trying to touch the body (someone shouting “Don’t let the Indians touch the body!”) peasants dragging carts out of prehistory back to their villages. We walked past the wrecked coach which had been turned into a PWD canteen selling tea and samosas. The presence of hundreds of foreigners in white robes carrying the body of their dead guru through the rush hour did not seem to particularly interest, let alone faze, anyone. While we waited at the traffic lights a young truck driver, manky tea-towel wrapped round his head and *beedi* clenched between his teeth, leaned out of his cab and yelled something cheerfully enough. A young woman in a sari sat on the back of her fiancé’s bicycle, reading a book in the light of a truck headlights. A London double-decker bus, incredibly battered, went by like something out of a dream.

‘Rich man’s guru,’ that was what they had said, wasn’t it? Well, there didn’t seem to be too much money around that night, as we turned off the main road and took the little side-road leading down to the burning ghat. We passed the shack selling sugar and soap and beedis, and went on down through the slum. This was the cremation of an ordinary Indian.

The Burning Ghat

The ghat is just a bowl in the river bank, with a small Shiva temple and an ancient banyan, suffused like all the rest with the desperate grimy romanticism of the land. The fire-pits are set in cheap concrete. The river doesn't actually come up to the steps except during monsoon. But that night as the ghat filled up with figures in white it took on a grand, almost operatic quality. People edged up into the scrub surrounding the ghat, or climbed onto the corrugated asbestos roof of the Pilgrim Shed, or up into the old banyan itself, to sit like children with their legs swinging from the boughs.

From where Asha and I were standing, slightly to one side, it was difficult to see as they brought the body to the fire-pit. The pyre had already been built. (I remember thinking, how together all this was. How come the pyre was already made? They'd said he died at five o'clock, hadn't they, and what was it now? Around eight? I remember thinking, they're not telling the truth about the time he died. Why? Why were they in such a hurry to burn the body?) They must have laid his body on it and poured the *ghee*, the boiled butter, over the firewood as they built it up and over him. Someone played a flute, very softly, and just for a minute or two – and then they put a torch to the pyre.

The butter went up, almost like petrol. People drew back in alarm. Only then did it hit, that he really was dead... The glare coming off the pyre was as soulless as neon. Instantly the ghat was revealed for what it really was. The ghat was a horror trip. Perhaps Death did come dancing.

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Dancing the way the ghat was dancing now, weaving this way and that, in great sheets of light; moving in for the dreamy kill... I wondered who would drive the sharpened pole into Osho's skull to pierce it, lest, as his brains boiled and vaporised, the skull exploded... How had it all come to this – this shambles worthy of the last act of a Jacobean tragedy?

2

Spiritual Gangster

Osho said he was murdered.

He said he was poisoned while he was in the hands of the US government.

During the last days of the commune the scene turned really ugly. For several weeks it looked as though violence on a frighteningly large scale was about to break out. They had put the National Guard on full alert just a few miles away, and the commune was bristling with guns; that's what the locals were so worried about, they knew the sannyasins had Uzis and assault rifles. In what appears to have been an eminently sensible attempt to de-fuse the situation Osho and a small group of disciples flew out of Oregon in two private jets. They were heading right across America, with their flight destination logged as Charlotte, North Carolina.

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Little did they know it, but the planes as they taxied across the runway in Charlotte had flown straight into a police stake-out. Suddenly, as they drew to a halt, they were pinned by searchlights and the planes were stormed by armed police. Osho and his party, mostly women, were thrown up against the side of the planes and frisked. Then they were bundled into police cars and, sirens screaming and lights flashing, driven off into the night.

Osho was separated from everyone else and, despite the fact there were not even any arrest warrants, refused bail.

After he had been held in custody for seven days in Charlotte, Osho's attorneys were told that he was being flown in the prison shuttle plane back to Oregon, to Portland to stand trial. Accordingly they all flew back to Portland to meet the plane. Only, when it arrived, Osho was not on it.

Far from being put on the shuttle flight back to Oregon Osho was flown clandestinely to Oklahoma City. His plane arrived at night in an almost deserted airport, where he was met by a police car and driven to the Oklahoma City Jail. There he was taken in through the back and met by a deputy who signed him in under a false name, David Washington. Osho however signed the form with his own flamboyant signature. Then he was told to pick up and carry an unusually grubby mattress and led to a small windowless cell. He was refused pillow and blankets, despite the coldness of the November night.

Spiritual Gangster

He was woken at an unspecified hour. The same deputy, who suddenly seemed to have become much more amiable, had brought him a new mattress, blankets, a pillow, and breakfast. Breakfast was two slices of bread soaked in some kind of red sauce.

No sooner had he eaten this meal than he was taken from the cell and driven to a second prison, the El Reno Federal Penitentiary, ten miles outside Oklahoma City. There he remembered only spending one night – the only night, he said later, when he slept soundly. In fact, as subsequent examination of the prison records revealed, he was in this second jail, the El Reno Penitentiary, for two nights. Osho seems to have had a complete blackout for one of them. Somehow the best part of a day was wiped out of his memory.

All of this was later corroborated by sannyas lawyers. They obtained copies of the forms from the Oklahoma City Jail made out in the name of David Washington with Osho's signature tippexed out, and proved Osho had in fact spent two nights at El Reno before his attorneys finally tracked him down and got him flown back to Portland... Admittedly this was all weird, even sinister – but to go from there to stating, as Osho did, that during this time in the hands of the US government he had been poisoned, either by the heavy metal thallium or by exposure to radioactivity, seemed to stretch credibility to breaking point.

Why should they do any such thing? Certainly, they were going to destroy the commune. There was never any doubt

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about that. No one in their right mind would have imagined that the US was going to tolerate any large-scale experiment in communism on its own soil – particularly one which was proving conspicuously successful. But surely there was no need to *kill* Osho? They had undermined his credibility. They were parading him round in chains on prime-time TV, like some barbarian chieftain through the streets of Imperial Rome. They knew they could deport him back to the Third World. Why kill him? Why run the risk of creating a martyr? Surely that was the last thing they wanted to do?

What was Osho doing then? Was he just paranoid? Or was he deliberately making a play at being a martyr himself? And a curiously clumsy one at that?

All I could say was that this didn't square with the person I had known. Osho was far too proud a man to lie... And his health *had* deteriorated to an extraordinary extent after his return from the States. It had been one unexplained illness after the next. His bones ached. His vision blurred. He seemed to be losing all resistance to disease... Osho had been a strongly-built, vital – enormously vital – man. That night, in the silver half-light, I could not see properly but the body I was walking beside did not look like the body of a man who had still been in his fifties. It looked like the body of a man of seventy. Whatever it was, he had been alarmingly ill with something.

I suppose my confusion about his death just mirrored my confusion about what had happened to sannyas after

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Osho left India. Before he left Poona for the States he had seemed to lead a charmed life.... Osho had been the closest thing the late twentieth century had seen to a major prophet. He had put psychotherapy, anarchism and religious experience together in a strikingly original way – gathering together in India a virtual army of drop-outs, who seemed finally to have found what they had been looking for during those turbulent years of the late 60s and early 70s. They were young, well educated, adventurous and, not infrequently, rich. Numbering perhaps a quarter of a million people at its height, the movement had spread rapidly throughout the West, seeing itself as the torchbearer of a massive social change, at once sexual, mystical and politically revolutionary. Osho had gone to the US in the early 80s to set up a pilot Utopia... and spawned what appeared to be a total nightmare.

At first the formula had seemed to be working as well as it had in India. I remember the first footage we saw of Oregon: there were these bare rolling hills, dotted with sage and juniper, just going on and on, until they were out of sight. It was snowing slightly. I couldn't believe the simple *size* of the place. It was high mountain desert, somewhere in the centre of the state, and approximately three times the size of San Francisco. It was there, deep in the canyons, that the sannyasins had started to build their City of Love. And they built it in record time. Soon they had roads and houses and power-stations; and shortly after that they had an airport and were flying their own planes. In fact you had to see aerial

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photographs to realise how big the city was: never had Hippies pulled off anything like this before. For that was the context to which the commune belonged: the tradition of the alternative society, of Haight-Ashbury, of the Left Bank of Paris during the summer of 68, of Woodstock: but fuelled with the phenomenal amounts of money, and we are talking millions and millions of dollars here, which Osho seemed to be able to generate.

Then these stories started to leak out... Osho was 'in silence' and was taking no part in the daily life of the commune. Everything was being run by his secretary, a young Indian woman called Sheela, who was acting in an alarmingly high-handed manner. All she seemed to be interested in was the economic and political expansion of the commune. People were working twelve to sixteen hours a day, and if they didn't like it they could get out. What had happened to Osho? What had happened to someone who had taught that never, under any circumstances, do you give up your individual freedom? As the months went by stories began to circulate of a man changed beyond recognition. On the rare occasions he appeared in public he seemed to have turned into a caricature of self-indulgent despotism – wearing flamboyant robes and demanding more and more Rolls Royces to add to his already huge collection of the cars. People said he was on drugs. At times it seemed almost as though he was deliberately trying to look like a charlatan.

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The end, when it came, was sudden... and luridly sensational. The Indian secretary fled, reputedly with fifty million dollars salted away in a Swiss bank account, leaving behind a regime which, had it featured in a novel or a movie, would have been dismissed as utterly implausible. There had been a series of poisonings, employing both rare drugs and bacteria, not only of individuals but also of large groups of people (though in fact no one had actually been killed); on top of which the whole commune was bugged. Subsequently Osho maintained he had not known about any of this. Perhaps he had not known about the poisonings or the wire-tapping, but there was no way he could not have known about the overall fascism of the set-up. In fact he had tacitly encouraged it. Why? What did he think he was doing? What was the point? Had he gone mad in some sense? Had the extraordinary intelligence he had evidenced somehow disintegrated – eaten away by... by what? By too much power? By the flattery and subservience with which he was surrounded? Was that possible?

In the emotional debacle which followed the question was never even clearly formulated, let alone answered. The commune, swarming with police and newsmen, broke apart... and became a killing fields for the media. Not just for sannyasins, but for the whole political and cultural Left which lay behind their way of seeing things. They criticised contemporary society but look what they did when they got a chance themselves! Their leaders were more corrupt, their behaviour more herd-like than anyone else's... The failure of

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the commune had implications far beyond its own collapse. Oregon was the last nail in the coffin for 60s political idealism. It seemed to show that there was nothing you could do to change human nature, and that anything you did try to do was bound to go wrong. People just wanted their leaders and their dogmas; people just wanted to be told what to do.

3

“Jump, Dance, Weep, Shout, Laugh...”

At the height of the summer of 1975 I was up in Dharamsala, in the Himalayas, waiting for the monsoon to break.

For the best part of a year I had been in India and Sri Lanka, studying Buddhism. In particular I was trying to come to grips with *vipassana* meditation, which method could be said to lie at the heart of Buddhist teaching. So simple is it, it can hardly be called a method at all. You just sit comfortably, close your eyes and allow your attention to rest lightly on whatever is happening in the present moment. It does not matter what it is that is happening, it can be the sensation of what you are sitting on, or a memory in your mind, or a noise

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outside the window. It doesn't matter, you observe it all with equal detachment.

You just watch... for in this approach nothing has any more importance than anything else. Never, and this goes right to the heart of the method, do you make any value judgments. If you like something, you merely note that you like it; if you dislike something, you merely note that you dislike it. Nothing has any greater status than anything else. Everything is just data. This in Buddhist texts is called 'bare attention', and the practice as a whole 'witnessing'.

Vipassana was the central meditation developed by the Buddha. Historically if you put it back in its context you can see how violent a break with the past it was. Before Buddha 'religion' was essentially a form of worship – worship of some god or other, a form of praise or supplication, a ritual whose nature was specified by a caste of priests who were the heirs of tradition. All of this was revolutionised, literally overturned by the Buddha. "Be a light unto yourself" he said. Go back to the beginning again, and work out everything for yourself. Pay no attention to what anyone else says: the past is irrelevant.

Clearly such an attitude – a voluntary embracing of complete ignorance – can only appeal to an individual, or perhaps to a whole time, which has come to doubt everything they once held as true; an individual or a time which has come to suspect that nothing is as it appears to be – that it itself is not as it appears to be. Seen as such meditation becomes essentially a process of social deconditioning.

“Jump, Dance, Weep, Shout, Laugh...”

And an alarming one at that. For technically the purpose of vipassana – the word vipassana literally means ‘insight’ – is to break up all existing patterns, and to turn experience into a vast mass of de-conditioned, floating data – data which is free to suddenly, spontaneously, rearrange itself in its own inherent form, however shocking or even insane this may be to our conditioned minds. The texts speak of a “turning about in the deepest seat of consciousness” – a sudden blinding understanding for which nothing could prepare you.

Perhaps, deep down, this really frightened me. Perhaps, deep down, I didn’t want to let go into this... well, total mental breakdown, I guess. Anyway – for whatever the reason – after a year in India, travelling all over the place and talking to different meditation teachers, doing intensive retreats for weeks on end, I had to admit that I had drawn an almost complete blank. I was going round and round in a circle. I mean, there were ‘insights.’ Long forgotten childhood memories floated up. There would be moments when everything somehow became one – still and perfect and beautiful – but they only lasted a short while and then were gone again. There would, particularly on the retreats, be these flashes of an incredibly intense rapture, which were somehow associated with the spine and the brain, but they lasted no longer than the moments of deep peace, and equally disappeared without leaving a trace... Basically I was just going round and round in my mind. Thinking as a process seemed to be

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totally out of control. It raced on and on; I was at once sunk in it, completely taken over by whatever was in my mind at that moment, yet at the same time somehow not aware of it at all. I couldn't stop talking to myself. My mind didn't seem to be 'my' mind at all...

This was when I met my first sannyasin.

Ananda Dass was a tall German Hippie, with long hair and a finely chiselled face. He was wearing what appeared to be a shapeless orange ball-gown; perhaps the first rains had already come because I seem to remember the dress being splashed with mud. Round his neck he had a necklace of wooden beads with a black-and-white photo in a wooden locket. "Bhagwan" he said, holding it towards me. It was a photo of a bald, bearded man looking into the middle distance. He looked a bit like Moses.

Ananda Dass was pacing up and down my little room in McLeod Ganj talking to me about his 'Bhagwan' when suddenly he froze, and an expression of alarm flashed across his face. He took a few steps with a curious halting gait. "It is a bit of clap" he announced, with a shout of nervous laughter. "I got it at the ashram." I thought I had not heard. "The ashram?" I repeated, on what I hoped was a judicious note. I mean, I didn't want to sound naive or anything. "Yeah" he said, taking a few tentative paces, stiff-legged like a bird. "Yeah." It was the odd stress he had put on the word *ashram*... as though to say, where else? That sounds a weird ashram, I thought.

“Jump, Dance, Weep, Shout, Laugh...”

Ananda Dass gave me an Osho book to read. It was a cheap Indian hardback, bound in black. *The Silent Explosion* it was called.

In the first few pages Osho said contemporary Westerners could not meditate because they were too tense from bottled-up feelings. Inside themselves was a thick layer of pain and madness which was blocking access to their real being. Failure to penetrate this left the meditator turning round and round in the shallows of the mind – obsessed, and fundamentally crazy.

Osho had, he said, been exploring an altogether different approach to meditation, and he proceeded to describe one such experiment in what he called ‘dynamic’ or ‘chaotic’ meditation. This was something best done early in the morning, and was divided into four stages, each of ten minutes.

First stage: 10 minutes of fast, deep breathing. You were to stand still, with your eyes closed, and to breathe through the nose as quickly and as deeply as possible. You were to do this chaotically, without any rhythm, and to keep it up for the full ten minutes. You were, he stressed, to drive yourself as hard as you possibly could. If you did so this breathing technique would quickly bring about hyperventilation and a huge rush of energy.

Second stage: 10 minutes. Cooperate with the reactions of the body and the emotions. Let go completely. Allow your body and emotions to do whatsoever this wave of energy prompted. “The body and mind will begin to move” he said.

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Do not control the reactions. Cooperate completely with your body. The movements will take many forms: don't suppress them. Let whatsoever happens happen. Jump, dance, weep, shout, laugh, anything you like. Let out all the madness inside. Express what you feel completely. The body will take its own course so don't interfere with its movements. Be a witness to the process.¹

Third stage: 10 minutes of shouting Hoo – Hoo – Hoo – Hoo. This was to build up the energy once more – only this time an energy purged of physical restlessness and subconscious emotional distress.

Fourth stage: 10 minutes deep relaxation. No movement – just silence and waiting. Be as a dead man. Totally let go of your mind and body. At this point, Osho said, meditation was 'possible.'

All tensions are completely exhausted. You can sit or lie down. But now be relaxed completely, and be empty. Leave everything and just remain as you are. This is the moment of non-doing, neither breathing, nor movement. Just silence.

You have become a vacuum, an emptiness, an open channel for divine grace. It pours in when you are not. You are totally conscious, relaxed, and doing nothing. In these moments meditation happens by itself. You are not to do anything to meditate. Meditation will just flower in you the moment you come to surrender your action oriented mind. The ego goes with the doer. You have jumped to the centre.²

Someone asked him: "Bhagwan, is it essential to express your inner feelings, your emotions, in this technique?" And he answered:

“Jump, Dance, Weep, Shout, Laugh...”

Yes, you must express what you are, totally. Of course that means madness because we are mad. We have been collecting every type of insanity for centuries... It is total nonsense to even try to discipline the mind. For you have not known the innermost core and are cultivating discipline on the periphery. You will become outwardly disciplined but the mad being will always remain within you. So the ultimate outcome is bound to be schizophrenic... First of all, one has to become mad to go out of madness. The demons and ghosts must come out of the machine before it can work properly...³

4

A Lecture on Knowledge and Knowing

Osho lectured at eight o'clock in the morning, every morning – one month in Hindi, one month in English. And once every month there was an intensive, ten-day meditation camp, where the meditation described in *The Silent Explosion* and a number of other active or 'chaotic' techniques Osho had devised were practised... This was the first day of a series of lectures in English, on Lao Tzu, on the *Tao Te Ching*, and the first day of a ten-day camp. It was raining. In fact it was pouring. The monsoon in Maharashtra was at its height.

A Lecture on Knowledge and Knowing

A queue, shorter than I had expected, was ushered past the side of Osho's house. We went through some dripping shrubbery then, with a sudden shock, turned into a large auditorium which had been built onto the back of the house.

Chuang Tzu the auditorium was called, I knew that much already, and it was a dramatic piece of architecture. With a sweeping marble floor and columns rising to a high ceiling it hit a classical, almost Grecian note... and was about the last thing you'd expect to find in this erstwhile Raj hill-station, some hundred miles south of Bombay. All along the back it was open to the garden.

I picked my way through the people already sitting on the floor, heading for the back. They were all sitting quietly, I remember being struck by that, how still everyone was. A lot of the men had beards and long hair, but they weren't exactly Hippies. Everyone was wearing orange, the immemorial colour of the *sadhu*, the religious vagabond in India; though different shades of it were worn and in a variety of styles (frequently it was faded, like an old pair of Levis, and worn as a sort of cloak).

I sat down and leant up against a marble pillar at the back. Everyone continued to sit very still. Behind me birds sang in the cold wet garden. From time to time you could hear old steam trains hooting down at Poona railway station; it wasn't far, less than a mile away. The sound was small and distant, yet incredibly poignant; a perfect acoustic miniature on the still morning air.

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Suddenly everyone was rising to their feet. Osho had come out of a small door at the front.

He paused and made *namaste*, hands raised, the palms joined together as for prayer, the ancient Indian gesture of greeting. He was a smaller man than I had expected, but more powerfully built: bald, with a beard streaked with grey, yet somehow very young and vital. He was dressed in a simple white robe and carried a fresh hand towel folded over one arm. The *namaste* was formal and very slow, he swept the audience making, so far as I could see, eye-to-eye contact with a large number of people.

Finally he lowered his hands and crossed to a high-tech modern armchair which was waiting for him.

Someone in the front row read out a short passage from the *Tao Te Ching*, just a few cryptic lines.

Osho sat there in silence, looking down. He appeared to be studying his hands. The silence deepened, the birds sang. Then he began.

“Religion is not knowledge, it is knowing” he said quietly. “Knowledge is of the mind, knowing is of the being.

“So the first thing to be understood is the difference between knowledge and knowing.

“Knowledge is never of the present, it is always of the past.”

The voice is calm but fast. There is a sense of urgency, but no sense of impatience. The tone is pleasant – indeed eminently reasonable.

A Lecture on Knowledge and Knowing

“Knowing is always immediate, knowing is here and now. You cannot say anything about it, you can only be it.”

There is no faltering – no trace of hesitation.

“Knowing has no past, it has no future, it has only the present.

“And remember, present is not part of time.

“People ordinarily think that time is divided between past, future and present. They are absolutely wrong. Time is divided between past and future, present is not a part of time at all. You cannot catch hold of it in time. Pursue it and you will miss...

“Present is eternity crossing time....”⁴

Certainly it was a virtuoso performance. I had never heard anyone who could just sit down and spontaneously talk like that. Some sannyasin had told me all Osho’s books were just his talks typed out, and hearing him I could well believe it. It sounded as though he was reading it out as he spoke – not only in the sense that the sentences were already all but punctuated, but that one felt one was being led through the stages of a carefully reasoned argument whose conclusion, when it came, would be quite inescapable... I felt overwhelmed: I began to space out. Trains hooted far away. Chuang Tzu became increasingly dream-like. Above Osho’s head, above the whole sea of orange, there was an enormous cut-glass chandelier hanging from the ceiling. I was surprised I hadn’t noticed it before. It looked like some-

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thing left over from a ballroom during the Raj. Its presence added a raffish, surreal quality to the proceedings. It looked like...booty. *Piratical*, that was the word I'd been looking for to describe Poona. *Piratical*.

I began to feel positively sleepy... Something I didn't understand at all at the time was this: that Osho was a great hypnotist; perhaps, in terms of being able to hypnotise large groups of people, a world-class one. Listening today to a tape of that long-ago lecture, there's a lot of hypnotic technique I can recognise now of which I had no suspicion at the time. The trailing esses, the odd emphases, the gaps. There are passages where the whole vibe of the lecture changes. Osho's voice loses that driving, metaphysical quality, and slows down... it becomes personal, as though he is talking to you, and to you alone...

"Inside everything is so dark. You close your eyes and there is dark night, you cannot see anything... even if something is seen it is nothing but part of the outside reflected in the inner lake..."

The voice is really silky now... it is the voice of a lover. The pauses between the words are getting longer and longer – you start to hear the silences between them rather than the words themselves.

*"...thoughts floating which you have gathered in the market-place, faces coming and going, but they belong to the outside world. Just reflections of the outside, and vast darkness..."*⁵

I was slumped, rather loudly, against my marble column at the back. I just couldn't get a handle on it – the

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washed-out, apricot robes and rags, the God-talk, the chandelier out of a Hollywood movie. I kept nodding off, then waking up with a lurch, the way you do on a bus. Bits I heard with jagged vividness. Gurdjieff. Rabia the Sufi. Bokuju. *Who...?* By now Osho was well into his stride. His delivery never faltered. On and on he went. More and more, on the occasions on which I tried to rouse myself, I felt I'd had enough of sitting on this freezing marble floor. I *wish*, I thought with sudden venom, *I wish you would bloody well shut up!* Time and time again he appeared to be tying everything up into a final, exceptionally neat rhetorical bow... only to start off once more.

"Enough for today" he said suddenly, at the very moment I had finally given up all hope of ever getting out of there; and all around me sannyasins were scrambling to their feet.

Osho rose fluidly from his chair. He made another less lingering namaste and, towel untouched and still folded over one arm, fresh as a daisy, made his exit through the same little door by which he had entered.

5

Dynamic Meditation

Perhaps another reason I kept nodding off was that I had been up since five.

The ten-day meditation camp had started with Osho's Dynamic meditation – this was the one he had described in *The Silent Explosion*, though he'd changed it around a bit since then – and which was scheduled for half an hour before dawn.

A group leader had switched on the tape in the dark, and the corrugated-iron roofed shed or hangar in front of the ashram was filled with the sound of drumming. Loud, tom-tom-like drumming. This was to spur us on to greater efforts

Dynamic Meditation

with the fast 'chaotic' breathing through the nose... This was all as Osho had described it in his book, as were the next ten minutes. "Jump, dance, weep, shout, laugh... Let out all the madness inside!" However the next bit, the bit where you shouted Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! had been updated. Not only were you to do the shouting, but you were to do it while jumping up and down with your arms in the air. This, while it was excruciating, did in fact summon up a sort of demented energy which I for one didn't know I had. At the height of it Osho's voice on the tape suddenly shouted: "Stop!" At this you were to freeze in whatever position the command caught you in. You were not to move a muscle... It was a very strange space because you were at once pulsing with energy, and yet there was nowhere for this energy to go. My mind kept stopping and everything got more and more intense. It was as sharp-edged as a drug. At times I'd panic and try to get things back to normal. But then, after a moment, this strange silence, this sense of fusion, would again as it were *well up*...

This was timed to coincide with the exact moment of dawn. Strange suspended interval it was as the first light crept into the hangar, picking out the statue-like people frozen in one or another instant of time – picking out the scuffed bamboo mats, the shoulder-bags and cloaks people had discarded... The end was different too. The music started up again and there was a fifteen minute 'celebratory' dance. In this you just danced quietly on your own, in any way you felt.

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Dancing... dancing wildly... dancing any way you felt... that's my overriding memory of that first camp. I had never danced so much in my life. All the meditations were to music, and music and dance ran like a scarlet thread through everything: through the mud, through the thunder and lightning, through the rain which bucketed down at the end of every afternoon... "All the old religions of the world" Osho said "were dancing religions. By and by they have disappeared, and instead of the dancing religions very dull and dead churches have arisen. I want to bring all paganism back into religion – all the dance and celebration and the song. All kinds of wild joys have to be brought back into religion; only they can infuse spirit into it... So dance!"⁶

The second meditation of the day, the mid-morning one, was devoted exclusively to dancing. The *Nataraj*, it was called – after the Dance of Shiva, the archetype of God as a dancer – and on the strength of this meditation alone Osho would be the Godfather of the 80s and 90s rave scene.

For forty minutes you were to dance – and to dance with abandon. You could dance any way you wanted, the only thing which mattered was that you threw yourself into it totally. "Dance madly, because in deep dancing energies melt very easily, blocks disappear very easily. One becomes total in dance more easily than anything else because the whole body as an organic unity becomes involved."⁷ Osho insisted that dancing was the simplest way to go deeply into meditation – but you had to dance and dance for it to happen. "When a dancer goes on

D y n a m i c M e d i t a t i o n

and on dancing, a moment comes when only the dance remains and the dancer disappears. That is the moment of enlightenment. Whenever the *doer* is not there, whenever the manipulator is not there, whenever there is nobody inside you and there is only emptiness, nothingness, that is enlightenment.”⁸

All Osho’s meditations seemed to start in the same way – with building up energy, with building up energy in the physical body. Where they differed lay in what they did with this energy once they had got it going... Another one, probably the most enjoyable of them all (during the camp there were five different meditations each day) was called the *Kundalini*. This was done just before dusk, and in a strange way was twinned with the Dynamic, which was done at dawn.

First stage: 15 minutes. Be loose and let your whole body shake, feeling the energies running up from your feet. Let go everywhere and become the shaking. Your eyes may be opened or closed.

I found that if I stood in a certain way, with the knees slightly bent, my body would begin to shake of its own accord. This trembling could become extremely violent – and seemed to release an enormous amount of energy. “Allow the shaking, don’t do it” Osho said. “If you force it will become an exercise, a bodily physical exercise. Then the shaking will be there but just on the surface, it will not penetrate you. You will remain solid, stone-like, rock-like within; you will remain the manipulator, the doer, and the body will just be following. The body is not the question – you are the question.

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“When I say shake I mean your solidity, your rock-like being should shake to the very foundations so that it becomes liquid, fluid, melts, flows. And when the rock-like being becomes liquid, your body will follow.”⁹

Second stage: 15 minutes. Dance... any way you feel, and let the whole body move as it wishes.

Any way you feel was something of an understatement. I suppose it was equally mad in the Dynamic, but that was in the dark and you couldn't see. On a good afternoon the Kundalini looked like the Snake Pit. (The rickshaw-wallahs, who even then were beginning to pile up round the ashram gates, had made a little hole in the bougainvillea so that they could see a bit of Western tit. They'd reel away from their peephole, giggling and rolling their eyes, stroking their little moustaches in an agitated sort of a way. But if you got close enough to look in their eyes, you would see something far removed from salacity: genuine fear, I'd say.)

Third stage: 15 minutes. Close your eyes and be still, sitting or standing... witnessing whatever is happening inside and out.

This seemed something very close to vipassana – only using music as a means of anchoring yourself in the present moment rather than, as various Buddhist schools did, concentration on the breath. However, if I understood Osho correctly, you were meant to make as intense an *effort* to stay in the present moment as you had made when you threw yourself into the shaking or the dancing.

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Fourth stage: 15 minutes. Keeping your eyes closed, lie down and be still.

This was the opposite. This was the cessation of all effort, that state of 'let-go' which was coming to seem the hallmark of all Osho's meditations... Witnessing was something which while it could lead to meditation was not in itself meditation at all. Witnessing was something you did, meditation was something which happened. Meditation was effortless. Meditation was non-dual. All you could do Osho said was "to create the situation in which meditation is possible." It had to happen of its own accord.

And did it?

Yes, it did...well, to some extent. As the camp gained momentum (and there were ten breakneck days of this, starting with the Dynamic before dawn and ending with a particularly weird one you did staring at a stroboscopic light, which was late at night) there were these brief moments when something extraordinary happened. I would be lying on my bamboo mat after one or other of the meditations and everything just *stopped*. There was a distinct click. You could say that time stopped, or that the sense of 'I' disappeared, or just that there was a deep sense of wonder – you could describe it in any of these ways, and they would all be both right and wrong. In fact as soon as I tried to 'see' what this state was it disappeared. It popped like a bubble, leaving nothing behind...

But the real impact of the camp lay in the rush of energy and openness it brought about.

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Reich – that was what I got off Osho's meditations. Reich – who said that energy is locked in the physical body, locked in the 'muscular armour' which protects the ego, and whose dissolution will undercut tension in the psyche far more quickly than any amount of analysis. What was it Osho had said? "Dance madly, because in deep dancing blocks disappear very easily." That was what seemed to be happening to me. The way I saw myself was loosening up – releasing, as was to happen to so many people over the next few years, a flood of energy in the process.

One afternoon, one suddenly sunny afternoon in between storms, I went for the first time to The Blue Diamond, the four-star hotel on the edge of Koregaon Park. Someone had told me you hung out there if you had any money. Going through the lobby you came to a bar, which gave onto a sparkling blue swimming-pool. All along the far end of the pool there was a group of young sannyasin women, perhaps in their late twenties, working on their tans. They were beautiful. There was a clutter of club sandwiches and fresh lime sodas along the poolside. I was puzzled. I had been in India long enough to see there was something wrong with the scene in Poona. There was too much money around. Drop-outs in India didn't have this kind of money – not large groups of them like this.

Where was it all coming from?

6

Darshan

In many ways Osho lived the life of a recluse.

After the morning lecture he went back into his house, Lao Tzu House it was called, and stayed alone in his room. No one knew what he did there. During the day the only person who saw him was his girlfriend for (and I think I was somehow shocked to learn this) Osho had a girlfriend – an English girl in her twenties called Vivek, who sat close to him in the morning lecture, as still as a statue, her face hidden by long hair.

The only time you could see him personally was in the evening, when he talked to a small group of people in private. This was called darshan. Literally the word meant 'seeing'. It was not particularly difficult to go, in fact by normal Indian

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standards Osho was exceptionally available: you just had to make an appointment.

Darshan was when Osho talked people into 'taking sanyas.' This, while it didn't appear to mean much more than wearing orange and the *mala*, the wooden necklace with Osho's photo in the locket, was something I was quite resolved not to do.

I guess I was still telling myself that the first evening a small group of us, some Indians, some Westerners, maybe nine or ten in all, were ushered round the side of Osho's house – not down the path through the shrubbery which led to Chuang Tzu, to the auditorium, but round the other side. I wasn't the only one, I was surprised to note, who was nervous.

Twilight was falling as, gravel crunching under our flip-flops, we turned the corner of Osho's house. The lights were already shining on a second, much smaller, marble porch, in the middle of which was placed the same pale, high-tech armchair Osho used in the lecture. We arranged ourselves respectfully in a semicircle on the floor, and after a few minutes Osho appeared at the door. He was followed by a small retinue who, as he sat down, arranged themselves around him. Vivek, the English girlfriend, sat down on the floor beside his chair; and next to her another woman whom I recognised as Osho's Indian secretary, Laxmi, who ran the tiny 'office' at the ashram.

What happened was that Osho went round the group, one by one, and you could either go up and sit right in front

of him and talk – or if you didn't want to do that, just indicate that you had nothing to say.

Osho started off with two young Indians who were taking sannyas.

Far from being the Bombay film stars who, so I had been told, were to be found at darshan these two looked like typically penniless young Indians. Osho was chatting with them in Hindi. Seeing him close up reinforced the impression I'd had in the lecture, that Osho was a much younger man than I had expected. Despite the bald head and the streaks of grey in his beard, his skin was an even olive and seemed quite unlined. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say he didn't appear to have any clear age at all: he was curiously timeless. He was wearing another of the plain white robes he wore in the morning. This, I noticed for the first time, had a contemporary Western-style turtle-neck, which somehow added to the sense of cultural dislocation... Finally he put a mala round the neck of first one, then the other of the young Indians, and wrote out a new sannyas name for each of them on a sheet of blue paper. The paper had some kind of tinsel in it and sparkled.

Then he started in on the Westerners.

A young woman went up and sat down in front of him. To my surprise she started talking about a pain she had in the throat; and, even more to my surprise, Osho discussed this seriously and at some length. Then there was another young woman who said she did not know whether she should stay

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in Poona or go back to the West. She cried a bit. “Good” Osho kept saying. “Very good.” Whatever anyone said he seemed to endorse it, and then take it further. “Nothing wrong with it,” that was another thing he kept saying. “So don’t be worried.” On several occasions he produced a little pencil flashlight, like those things dentists used to have, and shone it at odd but apparently quite specific points on the face or throat of the person before him. These he examined intently. I watched, increasingly appalled. It was like being in some mad doctor’s surgery.

That was one of the first things Osho did at darshan, he sort of capsized the situation. You could not come to grips with it, you had to let go... Things kept teetering on the edge of buffoonery, but never quite going over it. On the contrary I felt a growing sense of apprehension, as though some real threat was lurking amidst all this tomfoolery.

I was getting more and more rattled as my turn drew closer. I rehearsed my speech, but kept forgetting bits or getting them in the wrong place. With Osho sitting there, rolling his eyes and going “Good... *Good*,” it all sounded stilted and highly unlikely.

I was last.

I went up and sat down in front of him. I tried to tell him about the vipassana – about my feeling that my mind was out of control and that I was not properly conscious. Osho listened intently.

When I had finished he sat in silence for a moment, and then spoke swiftly... I can’t remember what he said first (some-

thing ego-boosting about vipassana, I shouldn't wonder) but I recall the next bit. There were far faster methods available today, he was saying. Nor was it just that vipassana was so slow ("travelling" he gestured graciously "by bullock cart in the age of the jet") it was inherently a monastic method.

"Vipassana isolates" he said, "and the test of meditation is in the bazaar."

The porch had faded away. There wasn't a trace of buffoonery. There was just intelligence in those eyes – intelligence, and quite extraordinary intensity. With a shock I realised how beautiful he was.

"All the old methods" he continued "could affect only part of the world – not all of it." The Marxist in me pricked up his ears at that. "Anyway you can practise vipassana here in Poona. I will instruct you." He paused. "It is much more effective if combined with a dynamic meditation.

"Otherwise vipassana is like trying to eat when you haven't got an appetite."

Suddenly the intensity ebbed. The marble porch came back. Some subtle token of withdrawal indicated my interview was at an end. I thanked him, and went back to my place.

Osho rose to his feet. He made the same slow-motion namaste as he had made in the morning, only this time quite unambiguously looking into the eyes of everyone present, one by one. Then he turned and walked back into the house.

7

The Ashram

Thunder crashed, the rain lashed down. Palms bent almost double in the wind. Even before the end of that first camp there was a series of police raids all over Koregaon Park. They came in the middle of the night, flashing torches, emptying rucksacks and lockers all over the floor. They were big city police, as cold as ice. They carted off a young Dutchman from the hotel for a bit of morphine; a few nights later they arrested someone else from a guesthouse just down the road, he had a kilo of hash soldered into a brass statue of the Buddha and another kilo soldered into a statue of Vivekananda, of all people... There were stories they were about to arrest Osho... Perhaps that's the most difficult thing to convey, the sense of revolt which was so widespread at the

time. Today, after twenty or twenty-five years of political and cultural apathy, even the idea of a large-scale refusal to go on living like this seems something almost impossible to comprehend. At that time people really believed life could change – could be rethought and recreated in a huge revolutionary breakthrough...

The 'Sixties'... the 'Seventies'... there's been so much media hype it's difficult to get at the truth of what was really happening then. Yet starting some time in the early 60s there was a groundswell of revolt among a large number of young people, a groundswell building up into a movement which, while it certainly had its roots in political disaffection, went very much further than mere politics. If you look at any number of breakthroughs made in the second half of the 20th century, the chances are you'll find they originated between the middle of the Sixties and the middle of the Seventies. Perhaps it is true that creativity always has this explosive quality, that it always occurs in chain reactions. One of the big ideas of the time was, if you looked at the 20th century as a whole, you could see that the really creative period lay roughly between 1910-1930: that was when everything which was to characterise the century, its revolutions, its art, its physics, its psychiatry, etc. etc. first erupted.

Certainly the 'Sixties' were no match for the paroxysm the West went through during the First World War; but, as its discontent peaked politically, the decade was still by far the most massive internal crisis Western society had experienced

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since that time. May '68 brought France to the verge of civil war, with de Gaulle readying his air-force to bomb Paris. SDS and the anti-war movement in the States, both of which functioned as umbrellas for ideas much more radical than their own, were enormous by the end of the decade. After the assassination of Martin Luther King there were more than 150 cities on fire in the US. At this very moment, when the movement had the chance of seizing real power, it lost its nerve and fell apart. "Time after time" wrote Marx "proletarian revolutions recoil – appalled by the monstrous indeterminacy of their own ends." Those, so far as I was concerned, were prophetic words. There was a wave of mass panic on the Left. No one knew what to do, and the moment was gone...

But the creative momentum of the time didn't stop there. It barreled on well into the next decade... but it changed its form as it went. The first part, the dropping out of school, the refusal to work, the LSD, the huge demos and festivals, the Paris May Days, all of this was very political... and it fell on its face. The second part was very much more psychological – much more about us all trying to understand what had just happened to us. Why had there been such a failure of social revolution? Why, when it was so obvious that society had lost all sense of direction – and wasn't going to regain it without a massive internal renewal? Why had such a movement failed? "Society represses the individual by making the individual repress themselves." I forget who said that, but it very much summed up the ethos of the early 70s. There

was a sense that the real enemy lay within – that we had all been conditioned much more deeply, much worse in fact, than we had imagined. In a sense, the revolution introverted... This was the context for the cultural breakthroughs of the time, the feminism, the ecology, the first real grasp of the relevance of mysticism – all of it sharpened up existentially by a series of new approaches in psychotherapy which could get right under your skin...

Those police raids in Koregaon Park set the tone for much that was to follow. At the time I don't think we realised that Osho, for all his madness, had a curiously streetwise quality – had in fact a far better sense of danger than the rest of us.

Right from the first he tried to make things look vaguely respectable. The ashram, he declared, was a personal growth centre. One of his earliest Western disciples, an English therapist whose sannyas name was Teertha, had spent a lot of time at Esalen, then the leading-edge psychotherapy centre in the world, at Big Sur in California; and when Teertha returned to England he had launched the first growth centre in Europe. Perhaps his expertise did a lot to speed up the process in Poona – though my own impression is that Osho had all the pieces pretty much ready to hand, and he just clicked them into place.

Teertha started an Encounter Group, which was soon to become notorious for its extremism. There was an adaptation of Janov's Primal Therapy to a group format; and then

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there was another group, which seemed rather disconcerting at the time, investigating ESP. By the New Year there were several such groups running concurrently. To these were added individual sessions in massage and bodywork – with particular emphasis, so far as I remember, on the deep tissue massage techniques developed by Ida Rolff.

All that winter there was a sense of creative power being steadily and implacably stepped up. As soon as you went through the ashram gates you could feel the raw surge of it, and it was a wonderfully exhilarating feeling. Something new seemed to happen every day. Another house was bought adjacent to Osho's, and work started to convert it into a residential block. Then a large empty field next to the original ashram building was bought (the whole now forming a solid rectangle of territory) and the foundations for a new meditation hall dug out. There were cement mixers, electric cables, queues of Indian labourers carrying tin scoops of earth on their heads. Bits of Western equipment started to arrive, a lot of it smuggled in. Someone donated a brand new landrover, which another sannyasin (as Osho, helpless with laughter, recounted during discourse) promptly stole and drove off somewhere to the south. At the same time the first big rush of Osho books started to come out. There was one on Christ, *The Mustard Seed*; another on Zen; but it was the one on Tantra, a lecture series on Tilopa called *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* which I remember as being the one we were all reading. Tantra was very much the

buzzword at that time: that seemed to be the central message he was trying to get across, that there was no contradiction between meditation and a life lived intelligently and passionately in the world.

Personally I suppose that's what really got me about him: that he was at once so creative – and I don't just mean lecture and write books, Osho was creating real life – and yet at the same time so still and utterly empty. So intensely in the world, and yet so open to the Void. I mean, in one sense, he hardly did anything at all. Cool as a cucumber, he'd come out in the morning and give his lecture – and even that had this unnerving quality as though he was reading it off the autocue – namaste gravely, and go back to his room. Later in the morning he was said to answer some letters with Laxmi; but otherwise, that was it. He just sat there on his own all day. He only had the one room, a bedroom, and though he spent the whole day shut up in there it was empty. According to most stories there was just a bed and a chair. And it was freezing cold in there, that was another thing everyone said. Osho disliked heat, and air-conditioning was his one luxury.

“But what does he do in there?” I asked.

Osho read a lot, everyone told me that. He read everything that came out on psychology, philosophy and religion; he had developed some kind of speed-reading of his own and read ten to fifteen books a day. He had an enormous library. It filled a large part of the house.

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“But what else does he do?” I would say.

“Nothing” people answered.

“You mean he meditates?” I’d ask.

“No...” and here a sort of bleak look would creep across sannyasin’s faces.

“He just sits there. He doesn’t do anything at all.”

Longer pause.

“He just sits there.”

8

“I Am for Absolutely Everything”

Among the groups which started that winter was a vipassana group. Like all the big groups it was residential; it went on for ten days, with a schedule of sitting which started before dawn and went on until late at night; and I ended up running it. There was little enough to do, but I was given the opportunity to meditate as much as I wanted. So it was, within a short matter of weeks, that Osho kept his promise to teach me vipassana for as long as I wanted to stay in Poona. He offered me food and shelter for as long as I cared to take it and he did so with an openhandedness which touched even me.

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My most vivid memories of Osho are of him at darshan, and this was very tied up with the vipassana group. As increasing numbers of people began to arrive in Poona and more and more groups were started, Osho would say to newcomers to try this or that group; and at the end of any group everyone who had taken part would go to darshan together. As group leader I would get to go along too, and this meant that I had a ringside view of Osho at work, in hands-on stuff with people.

The *mise-en-scene* of darshan never changed.

You went in and sat down on the floor in a semicircle round the empty chair. Then, like the light-switch had been thrown, Osho made his entrance. He had a superb command of theatre. Namasteing gravely (or was it with a trace of irony?) to everyone, he crossed the porch, sat down, and his small retinue would arrange themselves around him. Vivek sat to one side, Laxmi a little further back, while another devotee sat on the other side of Osho's chair. Shiva, the red-headed Scots photographer and bodyguard, who in the course of time was to play the part of Judas, stood in the background. None of them moved. There were exotic potted plants, in silhouette. The scene was as composed and brightly lit as a Nativity.

Osho would cross one leg over the other and, so far as I can remember, never move the lower part of his body again during the darshan. Though he was sitting in a modern arm-chair, he sat in as stable and rooted a posture as any Buddha.

“I Am for Absolutely Everything”

Perhaps he would thoughtfully rearrange a fold of his robe... How he got away with it, I'll never know. He just acted as though he was King, and that was all there was to it. Krishnamurti is the only other person I have seen who could carry the same thing off: could convey that sense of inherent aristocracy, of belonging to a different order of being. He too, if you could get close to him physically, seemed to have a subtle energy-field surrounding him, something you could actually feel... yet Osho was much more complex than Krishnamurti. Osho had an edge of pure mischief quite missing from the older man. That's what makes describing him so tricky, for whatever you say about him you have to add that the opposite could also be true. Regal he was – but in a flash he was like Dennis the Menace. The whole scene on that porch kept shifting. Nothing seemed properly fixed. That's another thing I remember about darshan: feeling vaguely sea-sick.

In his lectures on Tilopa, Osho had said:

“Tantra is a great yea-sayer; it says yes to everything. It has nothing like ‘no’ in its vocabulary, there is no negation. It never says no to anything, because with no the fight starts, with no you become the ego. The moment you say no to anything, you have become the ego already; a conflict has come in, now you are at war.

“Tantra loves, and loves unconditionally. It never says no to anything whatsoever, because everything is part of the

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whole, and everything has its own place in the whole, and the whole cannot exist with anything missing from it.

“It is said that even if a drop of water is missing, the whole existence will thirst. You pluck a flower in the garden, and you have plucked something out of the whole existence. You harm a flower, and you have harmed millions of stars – because everything is interrelated. The whole exists as a whole, as an organic whole. The whole exists not as a mechanical thing – everything is related to everything else.

“So Tantra says yes unconditionally. There has never been any other vision of life which says yes without any conditions – simply yes. No disappears; from your very being no disappears. When there is no *no*, how can you fight? How can you be at war? You simply float. You simply merge and melt. You become one. The boundaries are there no more. No creates the boundary. No is the boundary around you. Whenever you say no, watch – immediately something closes in. Whenever you say yes, your being opens...

“When you say total yes to existence, the whole existence suddenly is transformed; then there are no more rocks, no more trees, no more persons, rivers, mountains – suddenly everything has become one, and that oneness is God.”¹⁰

That’s what he was doing at darshan, trying to get people to say yes. To say yes to themselves. To say yes to themselves just as they were – without changing a thing.

"I Am for Absolutely Everything"

What would happen was that someone would go up, sit down in the hot seat, cross their legs, and launch into their tale of woe... It was amazing to sit there night after night and see how worthless most human beings secretly believe themselves to be... Osho would sit motionless and listen with that extraordinary intent receptivity he had. When they were done, he would pause and then (and this was done differently for different types of people) say that, yes he could understand how they felt that, but from his point of view this was not really a problem at all... in fact you could see it as being a very positive sign...

What he did at darshan was to lead you personally through a process of self-acceptance. Perhaps it was through having seen so many thousands of people but he had an extraordinary knack of detecting where a person's problem really lay – and was very sensitive in opening this up to the person themselves... But once he had got you there, to you seeing the basic thing you were on about, then all his skill was thrown into getting you to feel all right about it. His virtuosity was dazzling. He reasoned, he tricked, he cajoled. Perhaps he did it by laughter, by making you see how absurd was your insistence on your own unhappiness. He was perfectly capable of just making silly faces. But one way or another he got everyone into the present moment, and showed you that in that present moment there was nothing resembling a 'problem.' Everything was fine just the way it was... At this point you could see that Osho was playing one

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of the most ancient religious functions of all. He forgave. He remitted sins. He healed. He swept you up and showed you that seen through the eyes of Love you were perfect and whole just the way you were. That was the real source of his power. Simply he loved – loved without any edges. And thousands and thousands of people were to respond to that, to the feeling he was the first person who had ever really understood them and accepted them just as they were. “I am never against anything” he declared one evening. “I am for absolutely everything, so just enjoy it.”¹¹

If, despite all he did, someone insisted on feeling guilty then he would roll up his sleeves, so to speak, and really get down to business. There’s a famous line in Nietzsche, “Not your vices, but your mediocrity cries aloud to heaven.” Osho seems to have taken this and turned it into a positive basis for therapy. If, for instance, someone said they were getting angry the whole time, Osho wouldn’t say, o no, you shouldn’t be doing that;- on the contrary he would turn the whole thing round on itself. The problem, he would say, was that you were not getting angry enough.

“When anger comes you are not to do anything: just sit silently and watch it. Don’t be against it, don’t be for it. Don’t cooperate with it, don’t repress it. Just watch it, be patient, just see what happens... This is the moment to meditate. Don’t waste this moment; anger is creating such great energy in you...

“I Am for Absolutely Everything”

“Close the room, keep a mirror in front of you, see your angry face yourself. There is no need to show it to anybody else. It is your business, it is your energy, it is your life, and you have to wait for the right moment. Go on looking in the mirror, see the red face, the red eyes, the murderer there... ‘Know thyself’ does not mean sit silently and repeat, ‘I am Brahma, I am Soul, I am God, I am This’ – all nonsense. ‘Know thyself’ means know all thy climates, all possibilities – the murderer, the sinner, the criminal, the saint, the holy man inside you; the virtue, the God, the Devil...

“If you don’t do anything, what is going to happen? Can anger hang there forever and forever? Nothing hangs there forever... Let your face go ugly and murderous – but wait, watch. Don’t repress and don’t act according to the anger, and soon you will see that the face is becoming softer, eyes are becoming calmer, the energy is changing – the male turning into female... and soon you will be full of radiance. The same redness that was anger, now is a certain radiance – a beauty on your face, in your eyes. Now go out: the time has come to act.”¹²

Darshan *was* like some mad doctor’s surgery. A doctor who gave only one prescription, whatever it was you said was the matter: do more of it! do much more of it! If you want to be free of something you must do it totally. Being *total* – that was something he was always going on about in those days. He spoke of the way a young child gets angry:

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“If he is angry, he is just anger, pure anger. It is beautiful to see a child in anger, because old people are always half-hearted: even if they are angry they are not totally in it, they are holding back. They don’t love totally, they are not angry totally; they don’t do anything in totality, they are always calculating. Their life has become lukewarm. It never comes to that intensity of one hundred degrees where things evaporate, where something happens, where revolution becomes possible.

“But a child always lives at one hundred degrees – whatsoever he does. If he hates you he hates you totally, if he loves you he loves you totally; and in a single moment he can change. He is so quick, he does not take time, he does not brood over it. Just one moment before he was sitting in your lap and telling you how much he loves you. And then something happens – you say something and something goes wrong between you and him – and he jumps out of your lap and says ‘I never want to see you again.’ And see in his eyes the totality of it!

“And because it is total it does not leave a trace behind. That’s the beauty of totality: it does not accumulate psychological memory. Psychological memory is created only by partial living. Then everything that you have lived only in part hangs around you, the hangover continues for your whole life. And thousands of things are there, hanging unfinished.

“That’s the whole theory of karma: unfinished jobs, unfinished actions go on waiting to be finished, to be completed.”¹³

“I Am for Absolutely Everything”

That first evening out with Asha...

A group of us were having supper on the ramshackle balcony of a Goan restaurant, a few doors up from the West End Cinema, with its scratchy Third World prints of Hollywood movies, just round the corner from M.G. Road.

Somehow I had contrived to sit next to her. Weeks must have gone by because the heat was already starting to build up again; we were drinking bottles of cold lager.

I was very nervous. I watched her long fine hands. I couldn't believe that everyone else couldn't see how beautiful she was. Strange how alone that made her seem... We must have been talking about surviving in India (what little money I had was almost completely gone) when, towards the end of her second bottle of beer, she said to me confidentially:

“I got paid six thousand dollars for checking a suitcase on to a plane for Canada.” She paused. “Direct from Bombay” she added, as though that were significant.

For a moment I didn't understand what she was talking about – then I got it.

Drugs.

“Just for checking the bag in?” I asked.

I hadn't known you got paid *that* much. Her air of elegance fell into place. Converted into rupees six thousand dollars was a small fortune.

“Yes” she said. “It was a *kamikaze*... And they were old friends of mine.”

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I must have looked blank – a what? – and all I could think of saying was:

“But I thought the problem was taking the suitcase off at the other end?”

She glanced at me, murmured something about having done it before, and changed the subject. I seemed to have put my foot in it. Six thousand dollars? Who paid you that kind of money?

Asha – I thought, stunned – Asha is a gangster.

That’s what I thought he was doing, you see. I thought he was encouraging everybody to find out what they really wanted to do and to do it. I thought he was taking anarchism to its logical conclusion. In *Hammer on the Rock*, one of the early compilations of Osho at darshan, there is the following note apropos of Primal Therapy: “Bhagwan has described it not so much as a therapy as a situation where people can let go into their fears and madneses, their obsessions and secret hankerings, in a safe and protected environment and where help can be given to see beyond them.”¹⁴

Not so much a therapy as a situation. In fact as part of an interlocking series of situations, all of which were designed to allow people to accept themselves as they were and then enact what they really wanted to do. I thought he was using the therapy groups as building blocks in this process – blocks which interlocked into a space, a real space where you could explore without fear the way you truly were.

“I Am for Absolutely Everything”

But by no means was this just restricted to therapy group-rooms. The whole of Poona had this live-it-out quality. Nothing was forbidden. This was the reason Osho allowed, even encouraged, some people to be really obnoxious. To go, for instance, on all the stupid power trips for which the ashram was to become so notorious. He had to. He was forced to by his own logic. For it was no good repressing anything, you'd never get rid of it that way. The demons and ghosts had to come out of the machine. You had to live them through. The whole of Poona had this quality of being a kind of theatre, or madhouse.

“The whole point of all therapies” he said “of all group processes, is to create a situation where people can dare – that’s all. How you create that is irrelevant. You give them an impetus and a challenge. You open an abyss before them, and you tempt them to jump. The group is needed because when they are alone they will never dare, they will be too much afraid.”¹⁵

9

Shapeshifter

But what was it like, talking to Osho at darshan? What was he really like, face to face?

I have been staring into space, trying to find the right way of putting it.

“This gentle vegetarian” wrote the American novelist Tom Robbins, in a phrase the ashram loves to quote. There, so far as I am concerned, speaks someone who never sat in front of Osho. Gentle vegetarian, my eye. He was scary, Osho; he was really scary... What was it he said? “You open an abyss before them, and you tempt them to jump.” Well, that’s what it felt like – just like that. If I had to put it in very few words I’d say what Osho did was show me the possibility of total freedom... and what I did was to panic.

What's most in the way of approaching Osho is the model of the saint. Centuries of Christian conditioning have drilled it into everyone this is the way a 'spiritual' person behaves – when they are not going off into their precious alternative reality, they creep around like Goody Two Shoes. For Osho, just as much as for Nietzsche, this is a complete perversion of the religious impulse. The Christian saint is a product of class society: the Christian saint is an advert for slavery. Destruction of this whole, ultimately political, account of spiritual life is the sine qua non of any new sense of the sacred appearing today.

At the beginning of his teaching work, Osho's great American contemporary, Da Free John tried to convey the nature of enlightenment from the inside:

“The man of understanding is not entranced. He is not elsewhere. He is not having an experience. He is not passionless and inoffensive. He is awake. He is present. He knows no obstruction in the form of mind, identity, differentiation and desire. He is passionate. His quality is an offense to those who are entranced, elsewhere, contained in the mechanics of experience, asleep...”

That's much more like it. That's what it was like up there in the hot seat. Intense to the point of being almost painful.

Free John continues:

“... He is not spiritual. He is not religious. He is not – philosophical. He is not moral. He is not fastidious, lean and lawful. He always appears to be the opposite of what you are.

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He always seems to sympathise with what you deny... He is a seducer, a madman, a hoax, a libertine, a fool, a moralist, a sayer of truths, a bearer of all experience, a righteous knave, a prince, a child, an old one, an ascetic, a god.”¹⁶

That’s what Osho was like, he didn’t have a proper shape. “Bhagwan’s a bearded lady” announced one of the young kids careering round the ashram. In fact if Osho was like anything, he was like a young child;- but a child who had somehow escaped the adults, and grown up to equip himself with a massive intellect... I remember one darshan when he was going on to me at length about the group, how we should do something or other; I forget what, but it was all run-of-the-mill, practical stuff. He finished, and I started to get to my feet. At the exact moment I was physically most off-balance, he hissed at me, apropos of nothing, “Life is ABSOLUTELY meaningless!” It was a perfect shot. I straightened up and looked at him. There he was, beaming up at me, with this horrible expression of happiness on his face, as though he had informed me I had just won the Lottery.

But that was what he kept on saying, wasn’t it?

“This is the deepest realisation of all the knowers: that your being is a non-being. To say it is a being is wrong because it is not something, it is not like something. It is like nothing: a vast emptiness, with no boundaries to it. It is an *anatma*, a no-self; it is not a self inside you.

“All feelings of self are false. All identifications that ‘I am this or that’ are false.

“When you come to the ultimate, when you come to your deepest core, you suddenly know that you are neither this nor that – you are no one. You are not an ego, you are just a vast emptiness. And sometimes if you sit, close your eyes and just feel who you are – where are you? Go deeper and you may become afraid, because the deeper you go, the deeper you feel that you are nobody, a nothingness. That’s why people become so scared of meditation. It is a death. It is a death of the ego.”¹⁷

Osho was like an abyss... That was the first thing about darshan, then, the sense of vertigo... and, in its way, you could understand it. But there was another dimension to darshan which I didn’t understand then, and which I still don’t understand today.

Osho had some kind of energy field round him... I don’t know anything about these things, but this was something you could definitely feel for yourself, but you had to get close to him physically to do so. In Tantra this is called the guru’s *shakti*, his energy; and its direct transmission from guru to disciple, *shaktipat*. That sounds very grand, but the things which started to happen to me were downright weird more than anything else. One time I started to shake. One hand was shaking so violently I had to hold it on the ground with the other one, and then that one started to shake too. (Osho was sufficiently sporting to pretend not to notice this bizarre performance, continuing without a hiccup in his Thus-Spake-

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Zarathustra mode.) The space around him seemed to be flickering slightly, or vibrating. Another time I remember looking at his chair, and the angle it made with the floor was mutually impossible – do you know what I mean, the lines failed to converge in the distance, the same way they can do on LSD? Something definitely happened to my eyesight. When he was talking to you Osho always fixed you with his eyes – and it was true, just like they say about hypnotists, they did grow bigger and bigger. So did his whole head. Bearded, bald and implacably merry it seemed to fill the whole porch. All of it was very like LSD.

At the time I thought I was just getting hysterical. I thought all this weirdness was some kind of defence I was throwing up – basically as a way to stop myself getting sucked into his reality. Resistance, that's what I thought it was... Now I am no longer so sure. In conversation several other old sannyasins have said the same thing about talking to Osho at darshan being like coming on to acid. Same brightness, same elation, same thinning out of matter. Same edge of fear... Is this something more than just a metaphor? Are there parallels between *kundalini* activation and LSD – or is that completely crazy?

10

City of Love

As the numbers of people arriving in Poona began to multiply, you would see more and more young couples among them. Truth to tell, they didn't always look that good. Bedraggled from the heat and dust, and more and more often arriving straight from the West, straight from the lunacy of Bombay airport – from being hustled by every imaginable kind of low-life, from having stumps and tin bowls thrust in their faces, from the terrifying taxi ride up through the Western Ghats, from the grubby hotel at the railway station where they had finally been dumped – they didn't always look that much 'in love' at all. More often they looked as though they would like to kill one another.

That was one of the main ways Osho really opened up people's lives during those early years in Poona: by opening

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up their sexual lives. So far as I know Osho is unique among mystics in his insistence that sexual love between a man and a woman is a deeply 'religious' experience: falling in love is the one time in their lives when everyone spontaneously experiences meditation. But by the same token he would denounce most 'relationships' as being the very death of love...In the lecture you could hear it coming when he was about to go on a roll about couples. He would pause, and his voice would go just a little too solicitous, a little too polite – suddenly you'd hear the birdsong and the distant train whistles very clearly – and he would ask, well, what did all these relationships in which everyone was involved have to do with 'love'? Were all these couples you saw walking around together really in love? Mmm? Weren't they, on the contrary, both just taking one another for granted? Mmm? Hadn't that delight in the otherness of the other long disappeared? "My own observation" he said sadly "is that I have seen millions of people carrying dead love affairs which have gone dead long before, but carrying out of fear, clinging – just clinging with the known, with the familiar, although it is just misery and nothing else, but clinging.

"When love dies, it dies."¹⁸

You could feel bits of Chuang Tzu stiffen up; sense that people didn't want to look at one another. But there was no way he was going to stop. Weren't most of these relationships an almost...*political* arrangement? Weren't both partners sexually attracted to other people, yet had some

unspoken agreement that neither would do anything about it if the other didn't? What kind of a deal was that, then? Mmm? Was that what 'love' was...?

'The sex guru' that's what the *Poona Herald* called Osho. The sex guru. The Bombay press had dubbed him that after a series of lectures he had given on sexuality, *From Sex To Super-consciousness*, during the height of the summer of 68. Originally given to huge audiences in downtown Bombay, it was these lectures which first catapulted Osho into nationwide notoriety in India.

Traditionally, he began his first lecture by saying, sex has been seen as totally opposed to religion – however, so far as he was concerned, nothing could be further from the truth. "My conjecture" he said, "is that man had his first luminous glimpse of samadhi during the experience of intercourse."¹⁹

"Man cannot ordinarily reach the depths of his being that he reaches in the consummation of the sexual act. In the ordinary course of his life, in his daily routine, a man has a variety of experiences – he shops, does business, earns his living – but intercourse reveals the deepest of experiences to him. And this experience has profound religious dimensions: there, man reaches beyond himself; there he transcends himself.

"Two things happen to him in those depths.

"First, in copulation the ego vanishes. Egolessness is created. For an instant, there is no 'I'; for an instant, one does

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not remember oneself. Did you know that the 'I' also dissolves completely in the experience of religion, that in religion the ego also dissolves into nothingness? In the sexual act the ego fades away. Orgasm is a state of self-effacement.

"The second thing about the experience of sex is that time is undone for an instant. Timelessness is created. As Jesus Christ has said of samadhi, "There shall be time no longer." In orgasm, the sense of time is non-existent. There is no past, no future; there is only the present moment. The present moment is not a part of time; the present is eternity.

"This is the second reason man is so eager for sex. The craving is not for the body of a woman by a man or vice-versa, the passion is for something else: for egolessness, for timelessness."²⁰

At various points in his early work Osho gave explicit accounts of Tantric lovemaking.

While much that he says – that Tantra is concerned with a 'valley' rather than a 'peak' orgasm; that the man should remain passive, the woman initiating movement – has become, in the quarter century since then, a commonplace of sex manuals, the main point he is making has not. Sex is the perfect situation for meditation. For once, everything is focused naturally in the present moment. The mind is disappearing, the body is disappearing, the sense of self and other is disappearing – you just have to hold it there, on the very edge of the world...

Structurally you can see something very similar at the heart of Osho's own approach to meditation. If there is a prototype for his Dynamic then it is to be found in Tantric sex – the same building up, up, up of energy... then the immobility. "All meditation" he said "is essentially the experience of sex without sex."²¹

However, while Poona was certainly one of the most sexually liberated societies in recent history – by the end of the 70s it was an open secret the town was revolving round free love the way a Las Vegas, for instance, revolves round gambling – Osho himself never saw this as an end in itself. "Nothing wrong in it" he'd go;- but it wasn't the liberation of sex which really interested him, it was the liberation of energy.

In fact from the time of his *From Sex To Superconsciousness* lectures onwards he denied there was any such thing as 'sex energy.' There was only energy itself – an *élan vital* which was one and indivisible. There were however a number of evolutionary forms through which this energy could pass. Sex, physical sex, was the most basic of these, and Osho was concerned with it primarily not for its own sake, but because if energy was blocked there it would be blocked all along the line. For you cannot just repress sex: you have to repress energy as a whole. What he was really concerned with was the transformation of sex energy into love.

"Only sex energy can flower into the force of love. But we have filled man with antagonism towards sex and the result

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is that love has not flowered. What comes later, the form-to-come, can only be made possible by the acceptance of sex. The stream of love cannot break through because of the strong opposition. Sex, on the other hand, keeps churning inside, and the consciousness of man is muddled with sexuality.”²²

Towards the end of those *Sex To Superconsciousness* lectures he spoke of the role played in the past by the Tantric ‘sex temples.’

The function of a Konarak, of a Khajuraho or a Puri, had been completely misconstrued. The vast mass of erotic statuary was not just some simple-minded paean to natural sexuality, not exclusively – it was something far more sophisticated than that. Primarily the erotic sculpture was there for people to meditate on. In the past people had been taught to observe it, and their own reactions to it, until any element of unconsciousness about physical sex was gone. Khajuraho was a kind of psychiatry in stone – a provocation of the unconscious, of the obsessive channel of lust it contains, to surface and become fully integrated. The temples were anti-pornography machines...As the seeker consciously came to terms with these outer sculptures he or she would be allowed deeper and deeper into the temple, and as they did so the chambers became simpler and simpler, and all the sculpture gradually faded away. And at the core of all Tantric temples, so Osho says, they would always find themselves confronted with one thing and one thing alone: a totally empty room.

11

City of Love (continued)

What a world it was for lovers, Koregaon Park. I've not described that properly, the spell of Osho's Poona – the enchanted wood, the *Midsummer Night's Dream* quality to it...

In those days Koregaon Park was still separate from the town itself, still sleepy; backing up against the river on one side, and open fields on another, it was almost in the country. Once the most famous of all the Raj hill-stations, the resort to which Bombay high society moved in April and May, to get away from the stifling heat of the pre-monsoon, it had sunk into neglect and been all but abandoned since the British left in 47. When we first got there the whole place had this overgrown, sequestered quality. It was like Sleeping

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Beauty. The banyans with which the narrow lanes had originally been planted had grown enormous over the years; in many places they met and joined overhead, letting through only isolated shafts of light. Hanging roots had re-rooted themselves and the bougainvillea which grew everywhere climbed up them into the trees – higher and higher until it reached the sunlight and flowered, purple, amber, vermilion, as though it were the banyans themselves which were blossoming. There was hardly anyone around. Just the occasional Indian slowly clattering by on his ancient bicycle, through the heat and silence. Many of the old mansions had been boarded up for years and looked after by only a few shuffling servants. Padlocked rusty gates (the padlock itself an outlandishly huge Indian thing, already out of a fairy story) through which you could catch a glimpse of pillars, of sweeping verandahs, of defunct fountains and broken arbours, lost in the depths of the greenery. Koregaon Park was the perfect set for a romantic comedy.

“What is love?”

Time after time in his lectures, Osho would come back to the same question. What happens when you fall in love? Why is it so magical – and why does it always go wrong..? They became known as his ‘Sufi’ lectures, these talks where he explored the nature of love. His voice would go all velvety; Chuang Tzu would sort of melt...

“What is love?”

City of Love (continued)

“It is the deep urge to be one with the whole, the deep urge to dissolve I and Thou into one unity. Love is that because we are separated from our own source; out of that separation the desire arises to fall back into the whole, to become one with it...

“Man can find his earth through the woman, he can become earthed again through the woman, and the woman can become earthed through the man. They are complementary. Man alone is half, in a desperate need to be whole. Woman alone is half. When these two halves meet and mingle and merge, for the first time one feels rooted, grounded. Great joy arises in the being.

“It is not only the woman that you get rooted in, it is through the woman that you get rooted in God. The woman is just a door, the man is just a door. Man and woman are doors to God.”²³

When Asha and I were courting time kept coming to a stop. I remember one appallingly hot afternoon when we escaped from our jobs at the ashram, climbed over the back wall and dropped into the shade of the road on the other side.

We were both involved in the protracted, messy end of other long-term relationships, a typical Poona scenario, and often did not see one another for days on end. When we did...our minds just stopped. All the things it had seemed so important to say vanished without a trace. That afternoon we were just sitting there in silence, holding hands, on the curb of a crumbling gateway. Above our heads was a *gulmohr* tree

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and all around us was a carpet of the crimson and orange petals the tree produces in such profusion.

The air was thick with heat, and out of where it shimmered and warped in the empty lane a black shape began to form. It turned into a tattered figure, which turned into the magic-show wallah. He had the big wooden box where he kept the magic on a strap over his shoulder. In his hand he held a flute.

He came up to where we sat.

“Magic-show, sahib?” he said. “Memsahib?”

The magician was an old man, and was wearing a thick, high-collared jacket despite the heat. He had a cobra in his box, he said; he could make stones catch fire. Things happened in succession, one after the other, but there was no continuity, no link between one moment and the next. There was no sense of time passing. The way he approached us had been the same. He did not seem to be crossing space so much as getting bigger and bigger. Maybe babies see like that.

None of us moved.

“One rupees only” the magician said gently, after a while, and to no one in particular.

Then, as though he had done everything anyone could reasonably expect him to do, he shifted the strap on his shoulder and put his flute to his lips. Playing a few notes to himself he moved off across the carpet of fallen petals, and gradually dissolved back into the heat-warp... In my mind it is a wood, Koregaon Park, a magic wood like Brindavan, the wood sacred

City of Love (continued)

to Krishna in the North; and Osho himself often seems like Krishna, the Krishna of those garish lithographs they have in the chai-shops and *puri-bhaji* joints: Krishna playing his flute, sitting on a swing, surrounded by his *gopis*, by spellbound flowers...

In one Sufi lecture series, *Sufis: People of the Path*, Osho described what he called 'the three stages of love.' Love One, Love Two and Love Three.

Love One is the normal 'love' between a man and a woman. They are attracted to one another and they become lovers. They are happy, they move in together... and the trouble starts. As soon as their first exaltation starts to fade they tend, however subtly, to become possessive; they tend, however subtly, to become manipulative. "The moment love becomes a relationship, it becomes a bondage, because there are expectations and there are demands and there are frustrations, and an effort from both sides to dominate. It becomes a struggle for power"²⁴

The tragedy is that the lovers destroy the very quality which had attracted them to one another.

"The woman was beautiful because she was free. Freedom is such an ingredient in beauty that when you see a bird on the wing in the sky it is one kind of bird – but if you see the same bird in a cage, it is no more the same...The freedom is gone, the sky is gone. Those wings are just meaningless now. A kind of burden. They remind of the past, and they create misery.

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“When you fell in love with a woman when she was free you had fallen in love with freedom. Now you bring her home, you destroy all possibilities of her being free, but in that very destruction you are destroying the beauty. Then one day suddenly you find that you don’t love the woman at all because she is no more beautiful. This happens every time; then you start searching for another woman and you don’t look what has happened. You don’t look in the mechanism, how you destroyed the beauty of the woman.

“This is the first kind of love, Love One...”²⁵

The second stage of love, Love Two, is something very much more evolved.

Love Two is not about relationship. Love Two is not really about emotion at all. Love Two is about a state of being... You are no longer attracted to someone for this or that reason: you are attracted because *you* are loving. “The loving state is undressed.” You give because it is your nature – and what you give is the highest and finest thing any one person can give another... and this, Osho says, is freedom.

“A mature person has the integrity to be alone. And when a mature person gives love, he gives without any strings attached to it: he simply gives. And when a mature person gives love, he feels grateful that you have accepted his love, not vice versa. He does not expect you to be thankful for it – no, not at all, he does not even need your thanks. He thanks you for accepting his love.

City of Love (continued)

“And when two mature persons are in love, one of the greatest paradoxes of life happens, one of the most beautiful phenomena: they are together and yet tremendously alone; they are together so much so that they are almost one. But their oneness does not destroy their individuality, in fact, it enhances it: they become more individual. Two mature persons in love help each other to become more free. There is no politics involved, no diplomacy, no effort to dominate. How can you dominate the person you love?

“In fact a mature person does not fall in love, he rises in love...”²⁶

But even this second stage of love does not exhaust the possibilities of what love can become. There is still Love Three.

“In the first the object is important, in the second the subject is important, and the third...transcendence.

“One is not dividing love in any way. Subject, object; knower, known; lover, loved – all division has disappeared. Up to the second you are a lover. When you are a lover something will hang around you like a boundary, like a definition. With the third all definition disappears. There is only love, you are not. This is what Jesus means when he says “God is love.” Love Third...God is love. One is simply love, not that one loves. It is not an act, it is one’s very quality...”

“The first kind of love is I-It. The other is taken as a thing. That’s what Martin Buber says, I-It. The other is like a thing you have to possess. My wife, my husband, my child.

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And in that very possession you kill the spirit of the other. The second kind of love Martin Buber calls I-Thou. The other is a person, you have respect for the other: how can you possess somebody you respect? But Martin Buber stops at the second; he has no understanding about the third, where I and Thou disappear, where there is only love.

“Martin Buber cannot understand Jesus, he remains a Jew. He goes up to I-Thou, a great step from I-It to I-Thou, but nothing compared to the step that happens from I-Thou to non-dualism, to *advaita*, to oneness.

“Only love remains.”²⁷

12

Asha's Trade

Asha and I got together when the rains broke.

We moved into a room on the edge of the Park, an old hotel room with that high-ceilinged, almost sepulchral quality so prized by the English in India. There was a four-poster bed, an ancient lumbering fan, and outside the window the rain fell as calmly and evenly as if it was going to rain forever.

I was making tea on a Primus, mixing the sugar and the milk powder, moving through a present moment as thick as honey.

“I’m down to my last few hundred dollars” Asha said.

I didn’t say anything. By this time all I had was an old camera someone had given me, which I was trying to sell on M.G. Road.

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“There’s a guy coming up from Goa to see me“ she went on. “He wants me to do a run. I’m not sure, but I think it’s a false-bottomed suitcase to Canada.”

I could hear the nervousness in her voice...But when the ‘scammer’ as she called him arrived, far from being the oily gangster I had imagined, he turned out to be a sun-tanned young Dutchman – alert, humorous and quick-witted. I’ll call him H. He had brought the suitcase for Asha to examine, and it was expertly made. There were two and a half kilos of Manali in the false bottom, and two and a half in the false top, and the only thing you could feel was that the lid was a bit too heavy. But then the lid had those criss-crossing straps so that you could pack things there too. We started to talk and quickly found we had a lot in common. We all loved India, and had no desire to go back to the West. H. as it soon became clear was into smuggling as much for the adventure as for the money...

To cut a long story short, we decided that Asha and I would do the run together;- and soon afterwards we found ourselves checked into a Bombay hotel, with our tickets to Brussels. The plan was that I take the suitcase to Brussels where Asha was to get a new passport with no trace of India on it, and then take the case on to Montreal. The first thing was that I, unkempt and dressed in crazy orange clothes, be made to look normal. There was a tailor’s shop, *Paradise Tailors*, right by the hotel where we were staying – little more than a shifty old Indian with a Singer sitting under some

wooden stairs, but he measured me up and said he'd have some Western-style trousers ready in time for the flight.

I had an expensive haircut, then back at the hotel I tried on the navy blue blazer with brass buttons H. had lent me. I put on a pair of glasses I had but never wore ("makes you look intellectual" H. had said) and through which I could not see properly. What I did see looked eerily like a successful dentist.

Worse followed. I went back to *Paradise Tailors*, but when I tried to put the trousers on I found I couldn't get my foot into them. At first I thought I must be trying to get my foot into the pocket, so I turned them this way and that – but no, he had made the legs so narrow I could not get my feet into them at all. My self control snapped.

"Paradise, you arsehole!" I screamed. I was like The Imperialist in revolutionary propaganda. Paradise leapt to his feet and flapped round his broom closet like a frightened hen. Finally he fished round under the spot where he had been sitting and, muttering viciously to himself in Mahratti, produced the rest of the cloth I had bought and with which he, like an Indian tailor in a panto, had hoped to abscond. Finally he fitted panels, large diamond-shaped panels with malevolently crude stitching, into the sides of the trousers. They looked insane.

Check-in was at two in the morning.

Going through Emigration I was pulled out and told to wait. I sat down on a bench with two Africans. They looked

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guilty as hell. I tried not to think. Asha drifted past, looking dead cool. "Oh, are *you* on this flight?" she said sweetly. "Well, I'll see you in transit then." I could have murdered her. Then Emigration gave me my passport back again.

Finally we boarded. The cabin was monstrously hot and full of what were apparently Korean businessmen. They were all dressed the same and didn't move. It was like Zen at its worst. After a long delay the plane taxied off to what by now I was sure was certain doom in Brussels.

Neither of us could sleep. There was one trippy bit where we seemed to be caught in a loop, flying round and round over Mount Ararat in a bald and ghastly dawn. Asha and I had a furious whispered row up there. At last the airline served some breakfast and mercifully we both passed out until just before landing.

Coming through Immigration in Brussels a muscle in the side of my neck started to twitch. I had not known muscles could do anything like that. It was as though I had some small animal inside my shirt collar. I'll never get away with this, I thought...Then the bag didn't show up on the carousel. There were lots of dark blue ones, but each time I thought I had spotted mine it turned out to be somebody else's. ("Don't look around. Don't make eye contact," H. had said. "Whatever you do, don't look alert – that's what they're watching for.") Another flight was starting to come through, and still no suitcase...That first run was the only one I got frightened on. I don't mean that later I developed nerves of

steel; but while the run was actually happening I didn't get scared. That was one thing I did learn from drug-running: real physical danger does not produce fear. On the contrary real danger produces fearlessness...

Suddenly the suitcase was there. I picked it up and headed for the exit. "*Rien, merci.*" I said to someone in blue, in my best schoolboy French. He made a chalk mark on the side of the bag and I was sailing towards the glass doors...and through them...

Asha was there, looking wonderful, with a bunch of roses. So was our contact, another young Dutchman. "I came through in that blazer a month ago" he laughed, as he ushered us out of the airport. I couldn't believe it. Sunlight, autumn in Europe, thousands of dollars. "You looked really straight" he said, as he opened the doors of a beat-up old VW. "You could have been a dentist."

13

Sannyas Nation

78, 79, 80 – those were the years Koregaon Park was peaking. Thousands of people poured through the ashram. I don't know when, historically speaking, anything comparable last existed, a small town in more or less open revolt. "These are my people" Osho said when he saw a video of Woodstock – and in many ways that's what Poona was like, a Woodstock which never stopped. "I am the original Hippie"²⁸ he added; and the basic strategy he advocated was, in fact, very much a Hippie affair.

"The mystic is a drop-out," he said. "One has to drop out. The real revolutionary is not fighting anybody. He simply sees the absurdity of things, and drops out. He says, I am not going to be a part of it. This way or that, neither for nor against. It is *so* stupid that I cannot even be against it."²⁹

That's pure Hippie philosophy. You have no right to try and change anyone else; your only responsibility is to change yourself, and then act according to your own lights. If you try to change the system in any direct manner you will simply get sucked into it. That's what happens to revolutionaries...in the end they don't change the system, the system changes them. Look at a century of revolutions. None of them has done more than up-date the same basic rip-off.

"The real fight is not a fight at all. Very courageous people are needed to become drop-outs. If many, many people become drop-outs the world will change. There is no other way.

"I am all for drop-outs."³⁰

Again, the tactics drawn from this were very similar to those of the first Hippies. From the mid 60s on, from the beginnings of Haight-Ashbury in the States, from the first squats and demos in Central Amsterdam, the basic idea had been that you (a) refused to work, and (b) became part of a loose-knit community of other drop-outs. There you tried to set up an alternative life-style, for the only authentic way you could change society was by a group showing how you could do so here and now. You ran up a flag other rebels could rally round. You made your stand.

Such communities were identifiable with particular urban areas, as a sort of huge amplification of traditional artistic Bohemia. They reflected the central political idea of the 60s, that technology had reached a point where people could have more and more leisure, and that they could use

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this leisure in any way they saw fit. They could be creative in a way they hadn't been since they were children. They could play. That's what technology was for – not for producing more and more trashy commodities which nobody wanted in the first place, but for creating freedom so that you could do what you chose to do...If you want to put Poona in its historic context then this is where it belongs, as part of a whole series of Utopian ghettos: alongside the Haight and the Lower East Side of New York, alongside Kristiana and Tangier and Notting Hill, alongside the Latin Quarter of May 68.

The difference was that Poona worked.

Perhaps because it was the only place which managed to evolve an independent economy. For the therapy groups which had started out so humbly were, by the end of the decade, making money hand over fist. Acting with a bravura little short of piracy Osho had sailed off with the entire avant-garde psychotherapy scene of the early 70s. For psychotherapists, like everyone else working full-time in the ashram, were doing it just for board and lodging; all the money that was made was ploughed straight back in; there was no way Esalen, or any other growth centre of the time, could hope to compete. Even including the airfare to Bombay, the groups in Poona came out cheaper than anywhere else.

What's more, they were working in a far wilder and more radical perspective.

"The days of Tantra are coming. Sooner or later Tantra is going to explode for the first time on the masses, because for

the first time the time is ripe – ripe to take sex naturally. It is possible that explosion may come from the West, because Freud, Jung, Reich, they have prepared the background. They don't know anything about Tantra, but they have made the basic ground for Tantra to evolve.”³¹

For, so Osho argued, the history of psychology could be divided into three great stages.

The first, the psychology of Freud and the psychoanalysts who came after him, revolved around sexual and emotional trauma. This psychology was based on the study of individual neurosis and the attempt to cure it; but while this was enormously valuable as such, it was crippling as an overall approach. The only exception, the only figure Osho talked of with any real warmth, was Reich (“a modern Tantra master,” he said; rare praise indeed) and to all intents and purposes both Reich and his work had been destroyed by the US government.

This psychology predicated on pathology had produced, if only as a backlash, a second and more highly evolved psychology: the Human Potential movement of Maslow, Fromm and Janov, which had appeared in the late 60s and early 70s. The real breakthrough their work had made was to focus on the nature of health. What is happiness? What is love? What is creativity? What, deep down, do human beings really want? What ultimately is possible for them? But at the same time, while the Human Potential movement was an enormous step forward from psychoanalysis it still could

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not go very deeply into these issues without questioning the perimeters of human identity – which is to say, basically, people's identification with their own minds. And this would lead it straight into meditation.

Exploration of religious experience would constitute the third great step in the development of psychology as a science. Finally psychiatry would turn into what Osho called "The Psychology of the Buddhas." What exactly is meant by the term 'enlightenment'? How does an enlightened person perceive the world? Can this be triggered experimentally? For the evolution of the superman was, Osho said, the only serious work of psychology; and this was what all the therapy groups in Poona were moving a person towards. They interlocked in what he began to call a 'Buddhafield' – a total environment designed to accelerate an individual's development towards enlightenment. They would take a person through the basic exploration of their sexual and emotional trauma, which was the forte of Western psychology, on through the more playful, risk-taking approaches of early 70s therapy, and only then into the religious dimensions of life which the meditation retreats were designed to open up.

For Osho insisted that a person had to pass through the whole gamut of experience;- and this was the context in which he introduced one of his best known ideas, that of Zorba the Buddha. Zorba the Buddha was the Tantrika – the meeting point, the integration, of the most earthly and the most spiritual. Zorba the Buddha was the being who said yes

to everything, who accepted moment by moment existence unconditionally, and in that very acceptance transformed it. He refused to betray God for the world, or the world for God...The Buddhafield was the laboratory in which this work could be undertaken.

Was any of this an accurate reflection of what Tantra had been historically?

Or was it just a way of holding things together – of streamlining a complex philosophy, of providing an overall concept which the Hippies had never managed to evolve? You could see, for instance, that the orange robes did something like that. They gave sannyas a style, they fused it. They didn't appear to have a great deal to do with the Indian sadhu, the religious mendicant with which they were traditionally associated. They functioned as a way of bonding, of cementing group identity. They produced a burst of colour on the street which communicated far more effectively than any words...

At the time that's how I thought he was using the term Tantra – for its shock value, as a sort of stylish, slightly sinister packaging... Since I started writing this account however, and read up a bit on Tantra, it has begun to seem that Osho was far more accurate than I had supposed. In fact Tantrism was, and it is almost unique in this, a revolutionary religion. In his recent *History of the Tantric Religion* the Indian scholar N. N. Bhattacharyya argues that while both Hinduism and

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Buddhism were, by and large, religions of the ruling classes, Tantra was not. Tantra was a religion of the oppressed masses. Bhattacharyya proceeds to list the occupations of the first Tantric gurus of which there is any record, and they are fishermen, *dhobis*, woodcutters, blacksmiths, tailors. They were not even just working-class – many were actually *sudras*, or untouchables.

What's more, Tantra was not just against the caste system – nor even, for that matter, just against the patriarchy. Tantra was explicitly feminist. Frequently it was women and not men who initiated in meditation; there were, it appears, whole lineages of women gurus; all of this weirdly mirroring Poona, where the ashram came to be run more and more by women; but there are numerous other parallels. Sannyasins' emphasis on various kinds of bodywork for instance, far from being the me-generation self-indulgence the media were to portray, was typically Tantric. Bhattacharyya chronicles Tantrikas preoccupation with alternative medicine, with experiment with arcane drugs and chemicals, with alchemy.

You could argue such parallels in detail. Philip Rawson in his *Art of Tantra*, describes the celebrated *cakrapuja* rite "At this ceremony" he writes "drugs derived from hemp were sometimes taken as a sweet, as drink or smoked. Then the five powerful but usually forbidden enjoyments (fish, cooked hog-flesh, wine, cereals and intercourse) were ritually taken by a circle of couples as a kind of Eucharist presided over by the guru. In Cakrapuja the participants forget all distinctions

of caste and custom.”³² Seen through the distorting glass of history, this is a group of people struggling with their conditioning, with their taboos – and experimenting with the energy freed by breaking them. To all intents and purposes this is a medieval Encounter group...

Tantra, far from being an obscure off-beat cult, seems to have been something closer to a popular Resistance movement, continuing underground for century after century. In terms of the geographical area it covered its influence appears to have extended far beyond the Indian subcontinent and interpenetrated, or been identical with, much of early Taoism; while its roots in history seem to have been almost impossibly ancient. They stretch back way before Hinduism, before the Aryan invasion of India, and what we call Tantra could conceivably be the largest remaining fragment of a purely celebratory religion which antedated the advent of patriarchy.

Well, if the archaic core of Tantra was festivity, I think you'd have to say that Osho was almost painstakingly orthodox. Poona was like a huge party he threw – a decade-long party, and one to which everyone was invited...Again there's the tie-up with the revolutionary Left. One of the main political arguments of the late 60s was that poverty hadn't been eliminated, it had merely changed its nature. It had become psychological. A society had been created which ruled out much traditional suffering, the cold, the hunger, the disease;-

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it was just that it had ruled out the rest of life with it. Basically everyone today was isolated, bored and depressed. There had to be a 'revolution of everyday life'...And that was precisely what sannyas offered: it was colour, it was sex, it was adventure. The vitality hit you the moment you got off the train in Poona. "The accounts of those who took sannyas and those who did not often differ quite sharply in certain respects" observes Frances Fitzgerald with distaste "but they are consistent in describing a madhouse-carnival atmosphere."³³ Some day, when radical political feeling again starts to spread throughout society, Osho's Poona will be seen as a model of a quite different type of political action: one based on Eros. The revolutionary party really was a party there, and the pull it exercised was phenomenal.

How many people took sannyas during those years? The figure of a quarter of a million sannyasins worldwide was bandied about a lot at the time; and of these there were perhaps ten thousand in Poona at any one time...A couple of thousand crammed into the ashram (by now there were huts built all over the gardens, or on the flat roofs of the main ashram buildings) perhaps another seven or eight thousand scattered through the cantonment. Koregaon Park itself was packed. Every house, every room, every bit of boarded-up servants' quarters people could get their hands on was rented out. With nowhere else to go sannyasins started to stay in the fields at the back of the Park. At first they just slept

there overnight, then they started to camp. You could buy panels of woven bamboo for next to nothing, and lash them together to form a simple hut. Rapidly this bit of the Park turned into a sort of bamboo Glastonbury. Like a summer festival it was an architectural dream-scape, with huts and towers and stockades jostling one another. People made tea on old brass pump-stoves, and sat around talking. Orange washing was hung out to dry. There were lots of kids. There was a huge old well there, under some trees, where you could swim in the afternoons.

People were coming and going the whole time. Up and down from the beaches of Goa, which were only an overnight bus ride away, down through the mountains; or back to the West, to Europe, to Australia, to the States...There was an international network crossing borders backwards and forwards with ever-increasing flexibility, setting up more and more bases in Western cities as it did so. One of Osho's big things at darshan, when anyone was leaving Poona to go back to the West, was to get them to start a centre wherever they came from. He would just give them a name for it, otherwise they were given carte blanche to do anything they cared in his name, the meditations, groups, individual sessions, whatever. When Osho delegated authority he delegated it unconditionally; and I would say that it was through the proliferation of these small grassroots centres and communes that the movement spread so fast in the early days.

By the end of the decade Koregaon Park was something

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approaching a small independent kingdom. The police gave up on it, and as long as you stayed in the Park you didn't need a visa or even a passport. Supposedly there were various members of the Italian Red Brigades in hiding there. Certainly there was a booming underworld. If you wanted to stay in Poona and didn't want to work in the ashram (to work your way up the hierarchy, more and more) then really drug smuggling was your only alternative. The profits were enormous, and Poona played a key role in the fast escalating drug economy of the late 70s. The internationalism of sannyas, people knowing one another all over the world yet frequently not even knowing one another's real names, made it a perfect set-up. Poona was a masked ball. You could buy a passport for a hundred dollars or so in the Park, and they are surprisingly easy to tamper with. I remember there were these French junkies who used to specialise in forging passports: they did it with ordinary biros, using a magnifying glass to form apparently printed letters and numbers by building up a mass of tiny dots... There were camp-followers and lunatics of every description in the warm Indian night...

14

“My Whole Effort Is To Lead You Towards Nothingness”

So what went wrong? So how come sannyas was to crash a few short years later? What went wrong was that Osho wasn't just a social revolutionary. Osho was aiming at something which, while it took in social revolution, went much further than that. He was aiming at changing the nature of life and consciousness...

Commenting on Tilopa's sutra "*Cut the roots of a tree and the leaves will wither*" he had said:

"Tantra does not believe in improving your character. It may give you a good shape – if you prune a tree you can make

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any shape out of it – but the tree remains the same. Character is just an outer shape – but you remain the same, no transmutation happens. Tantra goes deeper and says, ‘Cut the root!’ That’s why Tantra was misunderstood too much, because Tantra says, ‘If you are greedy, be greedy; don’t bother about greed. If you are sexual, be sexual; don’t bother about it at all.’ The society cannot tolerate such a teaching: ‘What are these people saying? They will create chaos. They will destroy the whole order.’ But they have not understood that only Tantra changes the society, the man, the mind, nothing else; and only Tantra brings a real order, a natural order, a natural flowering of the inner discipline, nothing else. But it is a very deep process – you have to cut the root.

“Watch greed, watch sex, watch anger, possessiveness, jealousy. One thing has to be remembered: you don’t get identified, you simply watch, you simply look, you become a spectator. By and by, the quality of witnessing grows; you become able to see all the nuances of greed. It is very subtle. You become capable of seeing how subtly the ego functions, how subtle are its ways. It is not a gross thing; it is very subtle and delicate and deep-hidden.”³⁴

This is right at the heart of Osho’s teaching...Our normal state of mind is totally obsessive. Whatever trivial thing we are doing completely takes over our consciousness. We cannot see round it: we cannot see there was something before it, and there will be something after it. This is

“My Whole Effort Is To Lead You Towards Nothingness”

precisely what Osho is trying to counter. “One thing has to be remembered: you don’t get identified, you simply watch, you simply look, you become a spectator.” You must pull yourself out of the automatic flow of thought and sensation, of action and reaction, of one thing blindly spiralling into the next: you must stand apart from it, you must try and see what is happening objectively in the present moment. You must, and Osho uses Gurdjieff’s term here, you must *wake up*.

In fact it is Gurdjieff that Osho points to as the most important Tantric teacher of the 20th century.

And zeroing in on Gurdjieff, he says: “Gurdjieff has only one thing to teach his disciples and that is not to be identified. His whole school, all his techniques, methods, situations, are based on one simple base, and that base is: not to be identified.”³⁵ In another lecture from the same series – this is all from *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* – he discusses the term *self-remembering* which Gurdjieff uses as a key element in the process of waking up and witnessing. He describes in detail a typical Gurdjieff exercise. Take off your wristwatch and put it on a table in front of you. Now watch the second hand closely and remember one thing and one thing alone: you are sitting there watching the second hand going round. You will find, Osho says, that your basic sense of identity is so haywire that you cannot do even that. You have no continuous sense of yourself at all. You’ll be watching the second hand and suddenly remember you have to see someone at such and such a time, and start thinking about

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that without noticing you have done so. Or you'll see the watch is Swiss and start daydreaming about being in the mountains. "If you can attain to one minute's self-remembering, I promise to make you a buddha. Even for one minute, sixty seconds, that will do. You will think, "So cheap, so easy?" – it is not. You don't know how deep is your forgetfulness. You will not be able to do it for one minute continuously, not a single thought coming in and disturbing your self-remembering. This is the real darkness..."³⁶

At first this may seem as though it is simply the mind which is out of control. As though it is set in habits which over the years have become inflexible – but the problem is essentially of a technical nature. You can 'work' on yourself, in the Gurdjieffian sense: you can restructure your awareness, your attention: you can become grounded, centred, you can will yourself to stay awake...But, Osho says, this is not the root of the problem.

The root of the problem is that waking up from identification is a kind of death. Quite literally it is a loss of identity. You suddenly find you are no longer what you thought yourself to be. What you're aiming for – this simply watching, this simply looking, this becoming a spectator – has no form or shape: it is void-like, and surrendering yourself to it is like dying.

Osho was nothing less than frank. "My whole effort with you is also to lead you towards nothingness, to lead you to a

“My Whole Effort Is To Lead You Towards Nothingness”

total vacuum.”³⁷ You have to choose to become empty – yet all your instincts, your whole life militates against this. You can sit for hours, fooling yourself that you are trying to meditate, yet in nine cases out of ten the moment meditation really starts to happen there is sheer blind panic. This is the heart of conditioning – this stab of terror! You pull right out. You’ll do anything you can to restore the security of the normal subject-object relationship. Yet there *has* to be this let-go, this surrender of oneself into emptiness. At the heart of meditation there has to be this readiness to die.

Identification...Waking up...Panic...So far as Osho is concerned this is not limited to formal ‘meditation.’ This is the crux of all authentic experience. Through one of those sudden shifts of level at which he was so adept he brings it back to sex. “Let me explain it to you” he says “through some experience that you have got. When you love a person, you have to become a nothing. When you love a person, you have to become a no-self...”³⁸

“When you love, you have to become nobody. If you remain somebody, then love never happens. When you love a person – even for a single moment love happens and flows between two persons – there are two nothingnesses, not two persons. If you have ever had any experience of love, you can understand.

“Two lovers sitting by each other’s side, or two nothingnesses sitting together – only then the meeting is possible

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because barriers are broken, boundaries thrown away. The energy can move from here to there; there is no hindrance. And only in such a moment of deep love is orgasm possible.

“When two lovers are making love, and if they are both no-selves, nothingnesses, then orgasm happens. Then their body energy, their whole being, loses all identity; they are no more themselves – they have fallen into the abyss. But this can happen only for a moment: again they regain, again they start clinging. That’s why people become afraid in love also.

“In deep love people are afraid of becoming mad, or going to die – of what will happen. The abyss opens its mouth, the whole existence yawns, and you are suddenly there and you can fall into it. One becomes scared of love, and then people remain satisfied with sex and they call their sex ‘love’³⁹.

15

Osho's *Enlightenment*

“The abyss opens its mouth, the whole existence yawns...”
That was pretty much what had happened to Osho. What he later came to understand as ‘enlightenment’ was not the product of any ‘religious’ practice or way of life – in fact it took place quite outside any religious context at all. At the time he thought he was going mad...

Osho only talked about this once, in an early set of Hindi lectures, translated as *Dimensions Beyond The Known*. As a teenager, he said, he had been plunged into an intense adolescent crisis. Nothing seemed worthwhile any more. Nothing made sense. He tried to explore meditation, he

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hung out with sadhus, but none of it helped. "I doubted everything" he said. "I could not accept anyone as my teacher...I did not find anyone whom I could call my master...I wanted to respect, but I could not. I could respect rivers, mountains and even stones, but not human beings."⁴⁰ He read everything he could lay his hands on in his home town, then at 19 went to the big city, to Jabalpur, to study philosophy at the university.

While he was a student there his confusion got worse and worse, until finally he had a complete nervous and mental breakdown.

"It was all darkness" he said. "In every small matter there was doubt and nothing but doubt. Only questions and questions remained without any answer. In one respect I was as good as mad. I myself was afraid that anytime I might become mad. I was not able to sleep at night.

"Throughout the night and the day, questions and questions hovered around me. There was no answer to any question. I was in a deep sea, so to speak, without any boat or bank anywhere. Whatever boats had been there I had myself sunk or denied. There were many boats and many sailors, but I had myself refused to step into anyone else's boat. I felt that it was better to drown by oneself rather than to step into someone else's boat. If this was where life was to lead me, to drowning myself, then I felt that this drowning should also be accepted."⁴¹

"For one year" he said "it was almost impossible to know what was happening...Just to keep myself alive was a

Osho's Enlightenment

very difficult thing, because all appetite disappeared. I could not talk to anybody. In every other sentence I would forget what I was saying." He had splitting headaches. He would run up to sixteen miles a day, "just to feel myself," he said. Whole days were spent lying on the floor of his room counting from one up to one hundred and then back down again.⁴²

"My condition was one of utter darkness. It was as if I had fallen into a deep dark well. In those days I had many times dreamed that I was falling and falling and going deeper into a bottomless well. And many times I awakened from a dream full of perspiration, sweating profusely, because the falling was endless without any ground or place anywhere to rest my feet.

"Except for darkness and falling, nothing else remained, but slowly I accepted even that condition..."⁴³

"Slowly I accepted even that condition..." At some point he finally gave up. This was his introduction to that state of 'let-go' which was to play such a key role in his later thinking;- and from this moment, things started to happen very quickly.

"The past was disappearing, as if it had never belonged to me, as if I had read about it somewhere, as if I had dreamed about it, as if it was somebody else's story I have heard and somebody told it to me. I was becoming loose from my past, I was being uprooted from my history, I was losing my autobiography... Mind was disappearing... It was difficult to catch hold of it, it was rushing farther and farther away..."⁴⁴

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One night shortly afterwards the process reached its climax. Osho fell asleep early in the evening, in the little, box-like student's room where he was living. Abruptly he woke at midnight.

"Suddenly it was there, the other reality, the separate reality, the really real, or whatsoever you want to call it – call it God, call it truth, call it *Dhamma*, call it Tao, or whatsoever you will. It was nameless. But it was there – so opaque, so transparent, and yet so solid one could have touched it. It was almost suffocating me in that room. It was too much and I was not yet capable of absorbing it."⁴⁵

He rushed out of the room and into the open air. He walked through the streets of Jabalpur until he came to a public garden. Finding it locked, he climbed over the railings and sat down under a tree he found there, a *maulshree* tree, to which he felt strongly drawn. There he spent the night, sitting in meditation, and whatever it was that he spent the rest of his life trying to communicate happened to him...settled, and stabilised.

Trying to describe this twenty five years later it was still the negative aspects of the process he stressed. It was not that he found God, it was that he lost himself. God was what remained.

"A sort of emptiness, a void, came about of its own accord. Many questions circled around and around. But because there was no answer, they dropped down from exhaustion, so to speak, and died. I did not get the answers,

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but the questions were destroyed...All matters on which questions could be asked became non-existent. Previously, there was only asking and asking. Thereafter, nothing like questioning remained.

“Now I have neither any questions nor any answers.”⁴⁶

16

Resistance

What happened with sannyas was that Osho backed everyone into a corner where they saw they had to transcend themselves...and they found they couldn't – or wouldn't – do it. This, or so I'd say, was the crisis at the heart of the movement. Some people were so threatened they just blocked their ears and refused to listen at all. Others heard a bit, then saw where it was leading...and rebelled. Personally I was in that category. That was what was behind the whole trip I got into with drug running. It was resistance. I felt that I had really tried to meditate, and that I'd failed, and that Osho had somehow become a reflection of my failure. Smuggling allowed me to sidestep, in fact repress, this sense of spiritual failure: taking risks was an ego boost.

Resistance

That was a big part of my resistance, then, the drug running;- the other part was that I said to myself Osho was on a power-trip. I had a good bang on my anarchist drum. He gets up there every morning, I would say, and raves on about 'priests and politicians,' about the 'Mafia of the soul' – and just look what's happening, he's spawning a hierarchy of his own, every bit as obnoxious as anyone else's. He's very quick off the mark in his criticism of other people, but he's got a complete blind spot for where he's going wrong himself. After Oregon I suppose that's what everyone said, that Osho had been brilliant at first, but then he'd lost it, he'd been destroyed by his own success; he'd sunk under the weight of a mass of money-eyed yes-people; and then later, under a bunch of drugs.

Certainly as the 70s drew to a close there was no denying that sannyas was fast turning into a Church. Nothing else created by the Sixties counter culture had worked like this, and dizzying amounts of money were being generated. Laxmi's tiny 'office' of a few years before – little more than a handful of sannyasins transcribing Osho's lectures – had become the hub of an international consciousness-raising empire. The ashram was big business. You could see Sheela there – Sheela the brash young Indian woman who was to prove the nemesis of world sannyas – working her way into the heart of the organisation. First she was secretary to Laxmi's secretary, then she was Laxmi's secretary herself. You could see Teertha, the English Encounter group leader, who

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read the *sutras* before the lecture each day, swanning round like he was heir apparent. You could see the psychotherapists, promoting themselves as Osho's spiritual spokespeople, forming a priesthood under your very eyes...

But today, looking back on all this, I see something very different from what I saw at the time. It's taken me a long time to come round to it, but I think all these people were resisting Osho just as much as I was – only they were doing it in a different way. They were just pretending to agree with what he was saying, while deep down they didn't agree at all. Instinctively they knew something I learnt only several years later, when I had a kid: the easiest way to say no is to say yes and not mean it...None of the people working at the ashram wanted to go through the kind of crisis Osho was edging everything towards, that death of the self, any more than I did. And who can blame them? Osho's accounts of what had happened to him were hardly reassuring. "It was all darkness...I was as good as mad...I could not talk to anybody...I was falling and falling..." Who was going to choose to go through with this?

What the people in the ashram did was say they were working to spread Osho's 'vision' in the world, because that was the easiest way of not applying it to themselves. "Worship is a way to avoid the master" Osho said. "By worshipping him you start feeling that you are doing whatsoever you can do. What more is there? You need not change, worship is enough."⁴⁷ Perhaps this is one of the basic mecha-

nisms of all Churches. Certainly it would account for that phenomenon so obvious to everyone outside a Church, and so invisible to everyone inside it: that they are all such hypocrites.

So how come Osho couldn't see all this? Again, with the benefit of hindsight, I can only say I think he did...

One of the most striking things about Osho's enlightenment is that it took place when he was so young. That night in the public gardens in Jabalpur, he was only twenty-one. He had his whole life before him. What did he do?

For a long time he did nothing at all. He didn't tell anyone about what had happened: in fact he literally did nothing at all. He stayed on as a student at Jabalpur university, but just lay on his bed all day long. "I slept during the night, morning and afternoon continually. Whenever there was a chance to sleep I did not miss it."⁴⁸ He never cleaned his room, or bothered about food or chores. When he woke up he would just go on lying there, staring blankly at the ceiling.

This is all from the same account in *Dimensions Beyond The Known*:

"In those days I used to go on lying upon the cot, vacantly watching the ceiling above. I came to know after a long time that Meher Baba had meditated in this manner only. I did this without any effort, because while lying down on a cot what else is there to do? If the sleep was over, I would just go on looking at the ceiling without even blinking the eyes. Why even blink

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the eyes? It is also a type of doing. It is also a part of activity. I just went on lying there. There was nothing to be done. If you remain lying down like that, just looking at the ceiling for an hour or two, you will find that your mind becomes clear like a cloudless sky – just thoughtless. If someone can make inactivity his achievement in life, he can experience thoughtlessness very naturally and easily.”⁴⁹

The most he got together was to turn up for some of his university lectures – sleeping through as many of those as he could, while he was about it. Despite which he did manage to graduate. He got his BA in philosophy in 1955 and his MA in 57, finally becoming a professor of philosophy at Jabalpur.

All this time he continued to keep silent about what had happened to him. However his marathon let-go, which if I understand his account correctly lasted between two and three years, ended abruptly. Osho returned to normal daily life, and one of the first things he did was to set up that rhythm of reading a dozen or more books a day, with which he was to continue for more than twenty years. Literally he appears to have read everything there was to read on religion, philosophy and psychology. (“Mahavira’s fasting for days is nothing compared to reading all this rubbish” he said.) Later, and I don’t think he was being bombastic, he claimed to have read more books than anyone else in the world.

What I am working round to is this: that this is not the behaviour of a religious fanatic, of someone who has gone off at half cock. On the contrary, this is the behaviour of some-

one who is calmly and systematically preparing for something they have decided to do. Osho was exceptionally well-informed about the history of religion – and he could hardly have failed to notice what organisations set up in the name of any great mystic have done to their founder’s vision. Personally I’m sure he thought that resistance to a radical spiritual teaching was inevitable – how could it not be? – and that one of the main forms this would take was ostentatious devotion. I’m sure he thought a Church was unavoidable – and that, like all the rest, it had to play itself out, so that everyone involved could see what they were doing. All he could do was speed things up.

Did he know he was playing with fire? Did he know how explosive the internal contradictions within sannyas were to become? For if someone holds up a mirror to your potential, and you fail to live up to that potential, then they are just holding up a mirror to your own ugliness...Ma Dharm Jyoti recounts how one evening, when they first arrived in Poona, she was massaging Osho’s feet and suddenly felt that she was irritating him. He remarked, with a distinct chill: “Every disciple starts with the feet and finally comes to the throat...”⁵⁰ Then he said, more kindly, that he hadn’t meant her;- but this strikes me as being one of those rare glimpses you get into the way Osho really saw things. Was he well aware that behind all this emotional bowing and scraping, lurked a resistance of quite murderous intensity?

17

The Road to Oregon

For Asha and me our trip in Poona ended in the summer of 1980 when a run we were doing blew up in our faces.

By then we had long since graduated from false-bottomed suitcases. At the end what we were doing was simply to fill up a suitcase with hashish and walk through the Green, the Nothing-To-Declare. We didn't make any attempt to conceal it inside the suitcase, apart from sealing it in cellophane so that it didn't smell. This was, in fact, what a 'kamikaze' was – the name coming from the suicide missions of Japanese pilots at the end of the Second World War...though the term was, in truth, largely drug smugglers' self-dramatization.

Supposedly a kamikaze was one of the safer ways of smuggling. For, although you didn't make any attempt to hide

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the dope, you did go to considerable lengths to disguise where both you and the suitcase were coming from. What we would do was to fly out of India on a flight to, say, Amsterdam with a transit in Paris, so that when we got off in Amsterdam it looked as though we had come on the local flight from Paris. Customs only checked the international flights with any thoroughness, and generally you could walk off a European flight with a collection of businessmen and well-heeled tourists and there wouldn't be any real Customs at all.

Kamikazes could get more complicated than that. A lot, for instance, used two suitcases.

The first time we used two suitcases what we did was this.

Asha flew out of Delhi with a suitcase full of dope on a flight to Amsterdam, with a transit in Paris. When the plane landed in Paris she got off, leaving the suitcase checked through to Amsterdam. I got onto the same flight to Amsterdam she had just gotten off, with an identical suitcase, same size, same colour, same weight, only packed with clothes and things. When I got off in Amsterdam I picked up the original suitcase, the one with the dope, and headed for the Green;- the fail-safe being that if I was stopped by Customs I would do all this fumbling with the keys, and then say: I'm so sorry, I seem to have picked up the wrong bag. Go back to the carousel, bring back my own suitcase and open it up for them.

Well, that was the theory...At least it gave you a chance of brazening your way out of it, if everything went wrong. We were all as pleased as Punch with it, anyway...

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Our first kamikazes worked like a treat. Not that we even needed to do anything very often to get enough money to continue living Poona; to keep our little bougainvillea-smothered cottage in the back of Koregaon Park; to go wandering around India together, up to Kashmir, or down to the South. We were very happy in those days... But then, early in 1980, we put another run together and this time we thought we had it really foolproof. Asha had a false passport to check the bag in, so that even if the suitcase was rumbled in transit nothing would lead back to her. She checked the suitcase in on a flight from Delhi, transiting this time, not in Paris, but in Copenhagen. She got off in Copenhagen, I got on with a more or less identical suitcase – not even exactly the same, we had it all really polished by now – but what happened was simply that the bag she had checked in at Delhi never came off in Amsterdam. I was left watching an empty carousel go round and round in Schiphol, with nothing on it except my suitcase full of books and clothes. Finally I had to pick it up, and walk out. There weren't any Customs at all, I noted sourly... Where that suitcase went we never did find out. Maybe somebody discovered it in transit – it was very heavy – maybe a bent loader in Delhi got it. If that was what happened it must have made his day, there were twenty kilos of the best Manali inside... But for Asha and me something had snapped. We didn't try to get back to India. Instead we went to Vlissingen and took the ferry to London.

The Road to Oregon

Even before we left, Poona was bursting at the seams. By the end of the decade the ashram had some sixty different therapy groups running concurrently, and the situation was rapidly getting out of control. "Nothing fails like success." I remember Osho saying that at one of the first lectures I ever went to; and it was true. There was no way he could keep that early hands-on quality. Darshans were forced to become shorter and shorter, until finally any chance of talking to Osho on your own was done away with. On the one hand Osho was being edged into an increasingly distant, almost papal role; on the other the enormous pile-up of foreigners, many of whom had never been to India before, was leading to increasingly bad scenes with the local Indians.

Laxmi was away for much of the time, searching all over India for the site of a new, much bigger ashram. For somewhere remote, somewhere with woods and streams, somewhere preferably in the North, in the Himalayas, far from the baked plains of Maharashtra. But the Indian government, while it continued to dither about what to do with the public scandal Koregaon Park had become, did effectively block all attempts made to buy a large area of land anywhere else.

Several deals were sabotaged at the last moment, while the situation in Poona continued to deteriorate. There was an assassination attempt on Osho. Well, an attempted assassination attempt. A Hindu extremist threw a knife at Osho during discourse – but he didn't throw it hard enough, and it just sort of fell out of the air. It clattered at Osho's feet,

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where he looked at it quizzically for a moment, then went on with his lecture. Shortly afterwards a firebomb, which seemed a more professional affair, burnt up part of an ashram book depot; then another bomb went off outside the ashram medical centre, blowing up a row of bicycles. Shiva in *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* maintains that both these bombings were in fact apprentice work by Sheela: she was getting the hang of inflaming Us and Them situations. While Satya Bharti in her book, *The Promise Of Paradise*, insists that Sheela was already starting to experiment with off-beat drugs and poisons. Aided by a sannyasin called Puja, a Filipino nurse from the medical centre, she got Satya hospitalised in the ashram for some minor complaint and proceeded to feed her a cocktail of downers until Satya was reduced to such a state – all she could do, she writes, was lie in bed listening to Osho on a Walkman and weep – she had to be flown back home to her parents in the US. That's what Satya says, anyway.

Whatever the truth of these allegations, Sheela starts to appear centre-stage during that last year in Poona.

Frequently Osho spoke of "the New Commune" sannyasins were to build once the land they were looking for was found.

At first the note sounds almost conventionally Utopian:

"The time for families is over, and the time for cities is over, and the time for nations is over. The world should be one, consisting of small communes..."⁵¹

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Never mind Utopian, the political infrastructure he sketches out sounds surprisingly close to classic communism:

“First, the family cannot remain the basic unit of the society. It is the root cause of millions of diseases; it is the basic brick of which nations are made, races are made, religious organisations are made. The family has destroyed the blissfulness of men and women of the whole of mankind. Its basic structure is of possessiveness – the husband possesses the wife and they both possess the children – and the moment you possess a human being you have taken away his dignity, his freedom, his very humanity.

“Love, for the first time, should be given the respect that is its due for centuries. Love should be the only law between two human beings if they decide to live together; only joy should be their binding force.”⁵²

By and large the concept of the commune Osho explored was perfectly compatible with the rest of 60s radicalism...The working day should be reduced drastically: Osho spoke of four hours work a day being quite enough in normal circumstances. Cities too should be shrunk back in size until they returned to human scale; here he seems to have endorsed Plato’s rule-of-thumb that the healthiest size of a city is however many people you can know at least by sight. Schooling should be minimal; as a general rule adults should keep their hands off children and allow them to organise their own lives. Creativity, however, in whatever form, should be encouraged by every means possible.

Life of Osho

"I want every human being to be a discoverer: a Galileo, a Copernicus, a Columbus, in the outside world and a Gautam Buddha, a Zarathustra, a Chuang Tzu in the inside world.

"My whole effort is concentrated on one thing: to create the new man as Zorba the Buddha.

"In a model commune everybody will have the qualities of the Zorba and the qualities of the Buddha; tremendously interested in the outside world, and in the same way, in love with the inner search. The day you are both together you have become the new man, and the new man is going to be the saviour of humanity."⁵³

Good, rousing stuff...even a bit on the demagogic side – particularly if you remember he's not discussing just a political commune, albeit a sexually and creatively liberated one: he's talking about a Buddhafield. So far as Osho was concerned the point of any society was to wake you up, and it seems hardly likely the inventor of the Dynamic Meditation was interested in something as fundamentally placid as this. Other descriptions of a Buddhafield he gave at the same time evidence a more muscular approach:

"'Buddhafield' means an energy field where you can start growing, maturing, where your sleep can be broken, where you can be shocked into awareness; an electric field where you will not be able to fall asleep, where you will have to be awake, because shocks will be coming all the time."⁵⁴

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I think if anyone had listened to his discourses at that time a little more attentively they might have wondered what they were letting themselves in for.

“This commune is not an ordinary commune. This is an experiment to provoke God. You may not be aware of what is going to happen. You may be aware of only your problems. You may have come to me only to solve your problems. That is secondary. I am cooking something else.

“I am trying to create a space where God can descend more and more. This commune will become a connection. The world has lost the connection. God is no more a reality. As far as this century is concerned, Nietzsche is right that God is dead. The connection is broken...

“This commune is an experiment to create the bridge.”⁵⁵

18

Osho as Charlatan

One of these shocks which were to be coming all the time was, for instance, that Osho started to play the part of charlatan.

This was the time he started to tell whole slews of dirty jokes in the lecture. Osho had always used jokes in discourse, both as a means of making a point and as a rhetorical trick to inject a momentary burst of energy. But by the end of old Poona he had sannyasins researching them for him, and he no longer made any attempt to 'tell' them; he just read out whole batches of them, as though they were the newspaper. They were frequently quite filthy – racist, sexist, and unfunny...

Two drunken Irishmen are staggering down the road. One says to the other: "You're smelling real bad, Paddy. Is it

that you've shat your pants?" "Naw, naw" says the other, and they lurch on. But the smell gets worse, and the first Irishman says again, "Are you sure now you've not shat your pants, Paddy?" "Naw, naw" Paddy says, and they go on. But the smell gets still worse, and the first Irishman finally says, "Well, let's see in your pants then!" They find a streetlight, Paddy pulls down his pants and, sure enough, they are full of shit. "There!" says the first one, "What did I tell you! You shat your pants." "Aw" says Paddy, abashed, "I thought you meant today."

Now, that's one of the really good ones.

When you think how famous Osho was becoming, how people were crossing half-way round the world to hear him speak on 'spiritual' life, this barrage of diabolically unfunny dirty jokes was becoming something more than an oratorical device. The whole performance was bordering on Dada...

In retrospect you can see that Osho was already trying to undermine his own Church – to undermine the reflex of worship on which it was built. "Will you make a religion out of my jokes?" he asked, in one of his lectures from early 81. The answer, of course, was a resounding yes;- and the dirty jokes were to be no more than the first of a whole series of 'devices' on which he embarked, and which were designed to sabotage any attempt to make him spiritually – or socially – acceptable.

Perhaps too there's a deeper level to this playing of charlatan – during those last months in Poona Osho was changing, turning from the master psychologist he had been at darshan

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to the Zen Master role he was to play on the Ranch. For during that last phase in Poona, Zen starts to come centre stage.

Not that Osho hadn't talked about Zen from the very first – right from his early days in Bombay. Zen, he had always said, was the most highly evolved form of religion there was, and unique in that it was the only religious tradition still alive enough to enlighten people;- but never before had his talks on Zen had this urgency, this driving quality of being the point on which everything was converging.

The very last lecture Osho gave before he left Poona ended with his recounting the Zen story of Nansen and the koan of the baby goose brought up inside a bottle.

"The official, Riko, once asked Nansen to explain to him the old problem of the goose in the bottle.

"If a man puts a gosling into a bottle," said Riko, "and feeds him until he is full-grown, how can the man get the goose out without killing it or breaking the bottle?"

Nansen gave a great clap with his hands and shouted, "Riko!"

"Yes, Master," said the official with a start.

"See," said Nansen, "the goose is out..."

"This" he continued "is the only joke in existence. You *are* enlightened. You are Buddhas – pretending not to be, pretending to be somebody else. And my whole work here is to expose you."⁵⁶

Rather disconcertingly, for someone about to launch upon one of the biggest building sprees in recent history,

Osho appears to be saying it is stupid to do anything at all.

“Man lives in problems, man lives in misery. To live without problems, to live without misery, needs real courage.

“I have lived without any problems for twenty-five years, and I know it is a kind of suicide. I simply go on sitting in my room doing nothing. There is nothing to do!

“If you can allow that much silence to penetrate your very being, only then will you be able to let the goose out of the bottle. Otherwise, for a moment maybe...and again you will push the goose back into the bottle. That gives you some occupation; it keeps you occupied, keeps you concerned, worried, anxious. The moment there are no problems, there is no ego. The ego and the mind can exist only in the turmoil of problems.

“As I see it, man creates problems to nourish his ego. If there are not real problems he will invent them. But he is bound to invent them, otherwise his mind cannot function any more.”⁵⁷

Osho ended the lecture with the following words. Since they were the last thing he was to say in public for several years – and since at the time they looked as though they might be the last thing he would ever say – they throw a particularly unnerving light on everything which followed once the ashram was installed in the US.

“What I am telling you is not a teaching. This place is a device, this is a Buddhafield. I have to take away things which you don’t have, and I have to give you things which

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you already have. You need not be grateful to me at all, because I am not giving you anything new. I am simply helping you to remember.

“You have forgotten the language of your being. I have come to recognise it – I have remembered myself. And since the day I remembered myself I have been in a strange situation: I feel compassion for you, and deep down I also giggle at you, because you are not really in trouble. You don’t need compassion, you need hammering, you need to be hit hard on the head. Your suffering is bogus. Ecstasy is your very nature.

“You are truth.

“You are love.

“You are bliss.

“You are freedom.”⁵⁸

19

Shiva's Story

Of all the exposés of Osho the first, and most vicious, was the one written by his ex-bodyguard, a Scotsman whose sannyas name was Shiva. *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* remains oddly the most readable of all the books on Osho; perhaps because, for all its bitching, it gives more intimate, first-hand glimpses of Osho than any of the others... Shiva came into contact with Osho through the London alternative psychotherapy scene in the early 70s: he chronicles the early days in Poona, fairly enough in his way, apart from the fact that he never, for all the lectures and darshans he was present at, seems to have gotten the idea there was any philosophy involved whatsoever, beyond the idea that sex was actually O.K. Shiva presents himself as an intimate of Osho,

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attractive to women and a tough guy. Mmm. I remember that one of the things he had to do, in his capacity as 'body-guard,' was to stand at the gates of Lao Tzu in the evening, weeding out undesirables from the darshan queue. Each evening he would give this extraordinary wooden speech, about how you wouldn't be allowed in if you were wearing perfume or had used a perfumed hair shampoo (Osho was allergic to scent), how you mustn't ask Osho about money, how you wouldn't be allowed in if you were having a mental breakdown, on and on it went, ending up with the memorable line: "Do not pass wind before Bhagwan."...Well, across the abyss of the years, all I can say is: boy, did you ever pass a corker!

In *Bhagwan: The God That Failed*, Shiva describes how he was among the first sannyasins to arrive at the site of the new commune in the States – a huge property, a sprawling, 64,000 acre ranch, which Sheela had just bought for six million dollars – still a lot of money in the early 80s – in the hills of central Oregon. The Big Muddy Ranch it was called; and Shiva's already jumpy. Sheela's got power now, and she's out to break anyone who had status in Poona.

Indignantly humping a futon mattress off the flight from New York which Sheela has insisted he bring ("to save money") he's met by an ashram truck. They head off into the hills, pass through a little village called Antelope, the nearest neighbours to the Ranch, then jolt down sixteen miles of rutted dirt track leading to the Ranch itself.

Shiva's Story

"As we drove the rear windows became opaque with dust, and we coughed and covered our noses with handkerchiefs. "This is nothing, man," our Australian driver informed us cheerily. "Wait till you get to the ranch itself!"

"We bounced over a hilltop, and the driver swept a calloused hand across the horizon. "So far as the eye can see," he said, "is ours." In front of us lay a succession of gently rolling hills, with valley after valley dotted with stunted juniper trees and tired sagebrush. I took off my sunglasses to get a better view of this land, which seemed to have a slightly bluish cast. Yes, it was blue, and the air was very clear. But it was hardly the lush paradise Sheela had described. The land was tired out, and the tree growth looked like the survival of the fittest, the only things that could grow in this barren soil. There was not a bird in sight, nor a meadow, nor a brook. Dust swirled everywhere."⁵⁹

Finally they reach the Ranch; there is very little there, just a ranch-house and some outbuildings at the bottom of a valley. Shiva's girlfriend has dropped him, and he has to sleep in a dormitory. First he's put to work with a caterpillar loader, then with a dump-truck. It is hotter than India and Shiva, who to his credit turns out to be more of a Hippie than one had thought, is soon totally fed up with the whole thing. He thinks that when Osho arrives things will improve, but this doesn't prove to be the case. Osho, when he finally does arrive a few weeks later, never comes out of his deluxe trailer. From the very first day he announces that he is in silence and seclusion and, apart from seeing Sheela, wishes to play no

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part in the actual running of the commune. What does happen, however, is that the building work goes into overdrive. More and more sannyasins are flown in and with a sudden shock Shiva realises the size of what Osho has envisaged: they are starting to build something on the scale of a Renaissance city-state.

Reading between the lines of Shiva's book you can see there was a huge idealism that first year on the Ranch – a sense of building a new world, along with your friends – which completely passes him by. What he does do, however, is put his finger right on all the things the ashram accounts try to hide.

“While the rest of us worked long hours in perishing conditions, Sheela drove her new bright red Mercedes, wore Gucci shoes, carried Gucci handbags, and ordered Dior dresses and Dunhill sunglasses. Her hands glittered with gold, and she wore a man's solid gold Rolex watch on her wrist. Given her position of absolute authority, nobody dared challenge her excesses or attempted to check her in any way.”⁶⁰

Yet having said that he fails to note the curious nature so much of Sheela's fascism on the Ranch seems to have had – its flagrancy, its almost theatrical quality... Shiva cannot understand what Osho thinks he is doing. His house has been surrounded by instant Zen garden, by trees and flowering shrubs and peacocks, and he hardly ever comes out. If he appears at all it is dressed in outrageous quasi-biblical outfits he has taken to wearing. Sometimes he goes for long

drives through the desert on his own. He drives fast, both badly and dangerously. He makes no comment about anything, either one way or the other. Through Sheela, who with Vivek is the only person he sees – though in fact he spends a lot of time with her, up to as much as two hours a day – he repeats he is merely a ‘guest’ at the commune. What happens there is entirely up to sannyasins.

The first thing that happens is a huge row with the neighbours.

According to Shiva the basic flaw in the whole situation came from Sheela’s ignorance of US law when she bought the Big Muddy. All land in the US is ‘zoned,’ that is to say, there are only certain things you are allowed to do with it. You cannot just build anything anywhere. Now, incredible as it sounds, apparently Sheela did not know about this when she bought the Ranch, because the Big Muddy was zoned exclusively for agricultural use. To build anything there was illegal – let alone a city.

At first sannyasins just lied about how many people were living on the Ranch, and what it was they were building out there, among the canyons; and when that deception proved impossible to maintain, threw themselves into endless litigation to get the zoning reassessed; litigation backed up by some increasingly dubious *realpolitik*.

At one point getting the zoning changed seemed to depend on gaining control of the town council of Antelope,

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the village you drove through on your way to the Ranch. This sleepy little place never knew what hit it. Money was no object. Overnight all available property was bought and sannyasins moved in.

“Under Oregon law only two weeks permanent residency was required to become eligible to vote in a local election. To encourage locals to sell up, all night parties were held as noisily as possible near the homes of elderly people. ... Soon Sheela had managed to buy enough properties in Antelope to install eighty sannyasins there. Thus before we had been in the district a year, we outnumbered the old-timers two to one.”⁶¹

This got sannyasins their first truly hostile press at the state level; and they richly deserved it. Shiva recounts how he was taken off his dump-truck run and given the job of sitting in a parked car in Antelope, cradling an expensive camera. His job was to spook the residents by photographing them whenever they came out of their front doors. Almost all of them were old folks who had come to Antelope to retire...As the situation escalated nationwide TV got drawn in, and it showed sannyasins in an unequivocally ugly light.

Shiva, who has the basic decency to feel ashamed of this bullying, turns to Osho to understand what is going on...and finds himself facing a blank wall. Osho seems non-committal to the point of indifference. So far as Shiva can make out he is not particularly interested in the commune at all. He stays alone in his room. All he does is watch videos.

"In Poona he had read ten or fifteen books a day, and now he watched videos just as avidly. It was the full-time job of three sannyasis to make sure he had a constant supply of videos. His favourite films were George C. Scott's *Patton*, and *The Ten Commandments*. He had watched *Patton* five or six times already."⁶²

During that first year in Oregon the only thing approaching a public statement Osho makes is...he starts to collect Rolls Royces. According to the ashram, this was designed to cock a snook at American materialism: a gesture which, on the part of someone who had hitherto been a master communicator, seemed to fall flat on its face. Couldn't he see those cars were just turning everyone off? Shiva says that Osho got a Rolls Royce on the second or third day he arrived in the US, and he was to continue to get a new one every two or three weeks for the next four years. In one of the bitchiest parts of his book Shiva reports a conversation he overheard when Osho was telling Sheela that if he did not get a steady supply of Rolls Royces he would "leave the body." Shiva has the jilted lover's eye for damning detail: I am sure he is reporting the occasion accurately. Osho added: "Every week I will be needing more."

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Shiva's Story *(continued)*

All this time the commune was growing at breakneck speed.

For the first winter they just bolted together prefabricated plastic structures Shiva calls 'trailers,' which when joined up formed three or four-bedroom houses; but when spring came they started to build proper streets and houses. Then they began to dam the river, to break the vicious circle of floods alternating with drought. Then an airstrip. Then... That's the one point everyone who visited the Ranch agrees about, the material achievement. Starting with a modest ranch-house, a few outbuildings and soil which turned out to be classified as amongst the worst in America (Grade 10, out

Shiva's Story (continued)

of 10, or so Shiva says) an international bunch of misfits, none of whom had ever done any such thing before, built a city. They built roads and houses, workshops and small factories, dairy and vegetable farms. They planted woods and orchards, they laid down electrical and sewage systems. Within two years they had literally turned the desert into an oasis. There was living space for five thousand people, and there was temporary accommodation for the festivals, which were held each summer, for a further fifteen to twenty thousand. During the early 80s, when the movement worldwide was at its peak, there were sannyas centres in every major city in the West and a fortune (Osho later put it at 200 million dollars) was pumped into the Ranch.

But for what?

For poor Shiva, morosely jolting along in his dump-truck, back and forth from the wonderfully named Muktananda Sewage Lagoon, the whole trip in Oregon is making less and less sense. What has any of this got to do with Osho? In Poona he remembers Osho saying to him "Never let *anyone* dictate your life to you. *Anyone*." But what has the Ranch got to do with the vision of freedom and meditation Osho had portrayed in India? This endless work, this petty fascism? What is the point of any of it?

The way I am coming to see the Ranch, everything was in fact designed to revolve around freedom and meditation – around, more precisely, the space Osho meant by 'witnessing'; and I'll come to that in a moment... But Shiva takes everything

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at its face value. He doesn't question it at all – despite the fact that even his own account of the Ranch, for anyone who reads it objectively, is littered with clues pointing to a hidden agenda. Just look at Osho, for a start. Look at the way he is presenting himself. Look, for instance, at the one thing for which he was notorious while he was in the States – the only thing in fact that on the level of the media was ever known about him – his collection of Rolls Royces.

Officially the Rolls Royces, as I said, were meant to be some kind of piss-take of capitalism – or alternatively, they were meant to show that meditation was perfectly compatible with material luxury. Either way they were not communicating any such thing. What they were communicating was...*yuk!* They were communicating tastelessness. They were communicating vulgarity. "I could never follow a guru who had 40 Rolls Royces," an old friend wrote me from the States; and I could only agree. Those cars made my blood run cold...Osho was to clock up 93 of them before the end; and at the time, like Shiva, I could only think Osho had somehow lost it...But suppose, just for the sake of argument, you turn the whole thing the other way round. Suppose he hadn't lost his ability to communicate at all – and that he was communicating exactly what he intended to communicate. *That he was transparently bogus.* Because if you try it that way round then a whole lot of the pieces suddenly fit together.

From the moment Osho stepped off the plane from Bombay he was playing the part of an Indian guru straight

Shiva's Story (continued)

from Central Casting. Just look at the clothes. While Osho was in India he wore the same thing, a plain white robe, day in, day out. It was simple to the point of austerity. But no sooner does he arrive in the States than he starts to sport these over-the-top, Cecil B. de Mille outfits (“his Ming the Merciless costumes” I remember Asha saying at the time; and I remember being shocked at the bitterness in her voice). That’s why he was looking at *The Ten Commandments*. He was seeing what Moses wore.

Why? For several reasons. To stop what he was trying to teach becoming just another part of the smooth functioning of his followers’ egos. To stop what he was trying to teach becoming just another part of the smooth functioning of contemporary capitalism. Just another fashionable commodity. To throw a spanner in the works...That he was doing something along these lines, and with a lot of imagination, should have been much more obvious at the time than it was – particularly to Americans. One of the most celebrated political theories produced by the Sixties Counter Culture was Herbert Marcuse’s analysis of what he called *co-option*. Contemporary society, he argued, no longer deals with threats to itself by repression or overt violence; it adopts, in fact, almost the opposite strategy. You don’t gun revolutionaries down, you invite them onto TV chat shows. You sign them up for a book contract. It’s slower, but in the long run it’s much more deadly. This Marcuse also refers to as ‘repressive toleration.’ When Osho said “Nothing fails like success” he wasn’t just making

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some glib remark, he was pointing to exactly the same phenomenon as Marcuse... though he was applying it to religion rather than revolutionary politics. Churches are the co-option of mysticism. They are the repressive toleration of God. Most of Osho's clowning around while he was in Oregon – the series of increasingly bad vibe things he did – was an attempt to sabotage this. “Worship is a way to avoid the master” he had said; and as I read the situation worship was the central mechanism he was trying to forestall. Osho was not going to be stuck on a pedestal – an act which here, as in the sexual context, is a profoundly hostile thing to do...

But most important was the way he tried to use these images of himself as a rip-off, or a dangerous lunatic, to shock sannyasins. That's what he ended up trying to do with Shiva. The following scene, which I quote almost entire from *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* is, emotionally, the culmination of Shiva's account of the Ranch. Shortly after, he fled.

“In early 1982 Vivek asked me to come and take some pictures of Bhagwan in his dentists' chair. She mentioned something about daily sessions, and said that he wanted pictures taken all through the session. I was mystified. How could he need a dental session every single day?

“There was an absolute rule at Oregon that no drugs whatever were to be allowed on the ranch. When I went to take the photographs, I soon found that Bhagwan had found his own way of circumventing the stricture

Shiva's Story (continued)

about drugs – he was taking nitrous oxide as a consciousness-altering drug. I took shots of small clear tubes being passed into his nostrils and being held in place by a specially handmade clip. Bhagwan reclined. There were five people plus Bhagwan in the tiny dental room – the dentist, the dentist's female assistant, Vivek, Bhagwan's personal physician Swami Devaraj, and myself. The dentist twirled two knobs which were recessed in the wall, to balance the gasses, Bhagwan asked now for a little more oxygen, now for slightly more nitrogen. "Good. It feels right now." I clicked away, feeling like a voyeur in a bridal suite. Bhagwan's physician knelt on the floor and the dentist and his assistant were perched on stools, sitting slightly higher than Bhagwan's head.

"As the gas began to affect him, Bhagwan started to talk. His speech became increasingly slurred and slow. His normally sibilant trailing 's's' became even more drawn out and exaggerated as the gas started to have its effect.

"SSShhhheeeeeeeellaaaaa," he said "wants to buy me an aeroplane. But I don't need an aeroplane, I am flying already." I was glad that Bhagwan was flying again, but sad that this state had to be induced by a powerful chemical drug. The dentist's assistant wrote down everything that Bhagwan said in a little red book with a sharp pencil.

"I noticed that everybody in the room apart from me seemed to be completely unaffected by what was going on. They were obviously all used to it.

"Bhagwan went on: "I am so relieved that I do not have to pretend to be enlightened any more. Poor

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Krishnamurti” – who had denounced Bhagwan in no uncertain terms – “he still has to pretend.” Are you serious, I thought to myself. If Bhagwan was not enlightened, then what was I doing in this hellhole, subject to a thousand petty restrictions, getting ill and working in sub-zero temperatures to build a commune that was angering and deliberately antagonising the local people more by the minute?”⁶³

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The Big Muddy and the Perfect Way

So, behind all the masks, what was Osho trying to do on the Ranch?

Basically, so far as I can see, it was very simple – the Ranch was about witnessing. The Ranch was about waking up. The Ranch was about remaining fully present and alert in the midst of ordinary daily life; and everything was set up to that end... Certainly the Ranch wasn't exclusively about that – the experiment in communism, the attempt to forge a post-family, post-city, post-industrial life-style, all that was vitally important too; but it wasn't the central thing. Meditation was the central thing.

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You can see what Osho was trying to do more clearly if you go back to where sannyas as a movement had reached in 1980, just before Osho left for the States.

On the positive side, Poona had been an enormous liberation of libido. The bonds of much of our conditioning had been loosened, and it had been shown this didn't cause the mass backsliding into chaos the media would have us believe;- on the contrary it had produced a society which functioned very well economically, and in human terms was exceptionally loving. As such Poona was the most highly evolved and the most successful of the series of Utopian experiments which characterised the late 60s and early 70s.

What was weakest about it – or weakest about it so far as Osho was concerned – was the lack of any real understanding of what he was driving at with his stress on meditation. Through the power of his own personal charisma Osho could hold a large number of people in a basic state of meditation each morning in the discourse – but he was meditating them, it was all his effort. In much the same way there was a lot of basic satori in the therapy groups – this was where the real pull of the groups lay, in the profusion of magical moments they were sparking off – but these moments weren't being pursued consciously, in their own right, by individuals acting on their own behalf. People just became addicted to groups. This was the stage Osho tried to go beyond with the Ranch.

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While the Ranch was something different from what he had been doing in Poona, it was in no way a break with it.

On the contrary, he tried to keep the same high-energy, playful elements going – and to add a further dimension to them. If you want an analogy for what he was trying to do you can get it from his own meditations. Look, for instance, at the way the ‘Kundalini’ is put together. The first part, the shaking, is awakening energy in the physical body. The second part, the dance, takes this energy and converts it into something more expansive, more celebratory. That was, roughly speaking, where it got to with Poona. The third part, the sitting silently and witnessing, was what he tried to introduce on the Ranch.

And ran into enormous trouble in trying to do so... ‘Witnessing...’ You can feel the uneasiness about the idea in the very word itself. Witnessing – what a stilted, what a pretentious word! What an *unlived-in* word... But if you look at what it’s pointing at, you are faced with an open wound. *There’s something wrong with the nature of our awareness.* We are living like zombies. Everything inside is jumbled; we are swept along by things. It goes deeper than anything psychotherapy can reach. We are... Gurdjieff’s word is the right one... we are *asleep*. Asleep on our feet, and lost in dreams. We only wake up for long enough to realise we have been asleep, and then we blank out again. Somewhere Da Free John talks of life being “a compulsory tour of unconsciousness” and the phrase epitomises the real horror implicit in the situation...

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What does it mean then, ‘witnessing’? What does it mean practically?

Gurdjieff – and if there’s any parallel with the Ranch it is Gurdjieff’s Priory outside Paris in the 20s – spoke of three big steps in his approach to meditation. “Self-sensing...Self-observing...Self-remembering...” Self-sensing is to be aware of the physical body, the animal, sensory level of life, as this is the basic one and the easiest to become aware of. Self-observing is when this process begins to bite: you begin to see the automatic associations of thought and feeling, you no longer identify with them so blindly. Self-remembering is when the energy freed by dissolving these conditioned responses begins to pile up as consciousness itself. This is when real meditation starts – when consciousness becomes conscious of itself, when it begins to become conscious consciousness.

Self-sensing...Self-observing...Self-remembering... How well did any of it work on the Ranch? It is very difficult to tell. All the inside accounts of the Ranch have been written by a small group of self-appointed sannyasin celebrities – who seem, in point of fact, to have had as little real sympathy with what Osho was trying to do as Shiva did – while what is needed are accounts of life on the Ranch written by ordinary sannyasins: by the ones who built the roads, or worked in the kitchens, or whatever. There must have been experiences of satori there, I can’t see how there could not have been...But having said that I can only add that my own impression is that the Ranch (again like Gurdjieff’s Priory) basically didn’t work.

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All along sannyasins tended to take the Ranch literally. They were trying to turn what was first and foremost a meditation device into a political Utopia. If you read any of the accounts of the Ranch written at the time – Frances Fitzgerald’s *Cities On A Hill*, for instance – the whole hierarchy running the Ranch seems to have seen it almost exclusively as a political experiment. Some ashramite assured Fitzgerald of “...the unique social experiment going on here. One of our purposes is to be studied...Our concern is to create an alternative model of society for mankind.”⁶⁴ This kind of spiritual smugness was very much the target of Osho’s self-parody, the theatre for his presentation of himself as a phoney and a rip-off: this was why he was always egging Sheela on to be more and more obnoxious. What was it he’d said? “Gurdjieff has only one thing to teach his disciples and that is not to be identified. His whole school, all his techniques, methods, situations, are based on one simple base, and that base is: not to be identified.”

The Ranch was about introducing awareness into work, into normal everyday life in the world – and the great danger was that people got carried away with the excitement and forgot the important thing, which was not what they were doing but how they were doing it. All Osho’s interventions on the Ranch were an attempt to check this. No sooner had the ashram got their precious showcase for New Age values together than he or Sheela would do something absolutely awful. He broke his silence to announce poker-faced that the

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world was about to end. He began to leak it out that he was a drug addict. He wore demented hats. He bought more and more of his dreadful cars.

Beyond that, there wasn't a great deal he could do. In a sense he was hoist with his own petard. "I am for absolutely everything" he had said; and he had to stick by it. If people were to resist meditation in general, and self-observation in particular, by forming a political Church, then by his own logic he could only encourage them to do so. It was something they had to live through: they had to taste it to the full for themselves. He was incredibly coherent in his anarchism, Osho.

Krishnamurti for instance would have roundly denounced the whole thing. "Guru and disciple destroy one another mutually" he snapped, in words which were to prove eerily prophetic for the Ranch. Yet Krishnamurti himself was essentially playing the part of guru; in fact, for all his passionate desire to set people free, Krishnamurti tended to involve them in new and subtler forms of the same old double-bind. It's like the way he was always going on "O, can't we discuss this together, like two friends, etc. etc." in his talks;- but of course you couldn't discuss it with him, that was a load of rubbish: he was giving a lecture, which is an eminently authoritarian form. But Osho was trying to do what Krishnamurti was content with talking about. He was trying to set up a situation where people could see the truth for themselves. And perversely, the further astray they went, the

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closer they came to it. To a certain extent he had a vested interest in things getting worse.

“Nietzsche” he said “wrote a maxim of great insight. He said that if one wants to reach the heights of heaven he will have to touch the very depths of hell. It is really a statement of great insight. If a man wants to reach the heights of heaven he will have to go to the depths of hell. This is why mediocre people are never able to reach the height of religion, while sinners often do. Because one who goes deep into sin can rise to the height of righteousness.

“The technique of meditation is one of transformation through extremes. Every transformation takes place when the extreme point is reached.”⁶⁵

22

Sheela

I would say these were the basic elements the Ranch was about...the bogus guru was a part he was playing...the point was witnessing...and he felt that the situation had to play itself out in its own terms, if ever it was to evolve into anything truly different. To work this out in terms of a blow by blow account would be too detailed for a short introduction like this: the Ranch calls for a book in its own right. I'd much prefer to leave it at that, but there's still one major feature of the situation which can't be avoided: Sheela. What was going on with Sheela? Why did she play the part she did in the disaster which followed?

From the first the pressure on her must have been enormous.

And the workload of running the Ranch was only the beginning of it – for Sheela had to moonlight as an ogress. In this strange scenario of Osho for and against his own religion Sheela was at the epicentre of all the contradictions. Sheela did it, they were all to say; Osho didn't know anything about it, it was all Sheela's fault. Making sense of her behaviour is made even more difficult by the fact the main accounts of the Ranch were written by, or heavily influenced by, the accounts of the small group of sannyasins who lived in Osho's house – and there's a sense of jealousy of Sheela you can cut with a knife coming off all of them.

My own opinion is that Sheela was very largely what she appeared to be at the time, the disciple Osho was most interested by. If there was any one individual he tried to get enlightened it was her.

Why her? Firstly because she was a woman, and secondly because she was both fearless and had enormous vitality. Throughout all his early career Osho was feminist. At this moment in time he thought women had greater potential than men, and this was reflected in the people around him: there was an extraordinary group of strong women, Laxmi, Vivek and Sheela were just the most prominent – and three more different women would be difficult to conceive – whereas the men all tended to be wishy-washy. Not only would he have chosen a woman, but he wouldn't have chosen one who was primarily devotional in temperament – he would have chosen someone vital, someone with a lot of raw

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energy, because all his experiments in meditation started with that. (Several ashram writers recount the same story of Sheela in discourse one morning slipping a note to one of her cronies, *What an old gas-bag!* They are quite horrified;- but this was exactly the kind of raw material Osho needed.)

Why did he have her play the part he did? Because the whole purpose of the Ranch was to learn to do things without becoming identified with them, and Osho, once more in agreement with Gurdjieff, always insisted that *acting* was one of the easiest ways of doing this. (“Acting is certainly the most spiritual of professions for the simple reason that the actor has to be in a paradox: he has to become identified with the act he is performing and yet remain a watcher.”⁶⁶) If you look at the people around him, all those psychotherapists for instance, what sanctimonious drips they would have been if they were self-realised – but an enlightened Sheela let loose, that would have been something else! If you had to put it in terms of Indian religion that would have been, quite literally...Kali.

But Sheela cracked under the strain.

From what I remember of sitting in front of Osho it was almost unbearably intense, and what it was like day after day I can't begin to imagine. If he was trying to transmit his reality directly to you, I would say God help you. He was too much, Osho, he was just too much. That's the whole of his story in a nutshell...I think Sheela would have felt her ego was being backed into a corner – and if it wasn't going to

vanish there and then, then all it could do would be to go underground. Sheela would have been forced to become increasingly secretive. Perhaps I am projecting from my own experience, but my feeling is that crime was for her (as in fact it was for a good many other sannyasins) basically a form of ego defence;- certainly the explanation current in most of the books on the Ranch, that Sheela was doing large quantities of uppers and downers, hardly seems sufficient on its own to explain her behaviour.

When exactly she started using poison isn't clear. If Satya Bharti's story is to be credited, then it was before they ever left for the States. If not, then it was probably not till 83, when a local district attorney who was hostile to the commune suffered an untoward and grave illness after a cup of coffee with Sheela. There was a series of such illnesses, but whatever it was that Sheela – or more accurately Sheela and Puja, the Filipino nurse – was using, their doses were neatly calibrated never to cause more than a severe illness, and moreover left no traces in subsequent hospital tests.

The following year she launched into what appears to have been her main vendetta – the systematic attempt to poison Osho's personal physician, Amrito, "the handsome, wild-eyed British doctor" (James Gordon). Personally I'm not overly taken with this character – and I'd like to emphasise that in none of this has Sheela ever given her side of the story – but the current ashram account runs as follows.

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Each day, over the summer of 84, she introduced small doses of a still unidentified substance into the meal Amrito ate at the commune restaurant at noon. This was done by the manageress, who formed part of a secret cadre of women Sheela had recruited, and who made a point of serving Osho's doctor personally. For the best part of a year Amrito felt sick as a dog by the end of the afternoon; then he started to have his lunch somewhere else and his mystery illness disappeared. But he never thought of putting the two things together.

Over the same period, the summer of 84, Sheela set about bugging the Ranch. Starting with the rooms reserved for journalists in the luxury hotel they had built (she wanted to know what they were phoning back to their papers) she extended her operations until she had all the key areas of the commune under hidden electronic surveillance.

The question, of course, is whether Osho was privy to any of this. How far was he prepared to go with someone? "Every transformation takes place when the extreme point is reached." What does that mean in practice? If you look how far he was prepared to let the commune as a whole slide into totalitarianism, on the understanding that it would rectify itself spontaneously when the moment was ripe – then you could wonder how far he might have gone with an individual he considered exceptionally promising. His own experience of enlightenment had been so intense he would have anticipated, even expected, some degree of violence or despair.

Yet at the same time he couldn't have known all that much. According to some accounts, for instance, Sheela tried to kill Vivek. She had two members of her gang try to break into Vivek's bedroom in the middle of the night, carrying chloroform and a syringe full of poison. Providentially Vivek had bolted the door on the inside. This type of lunacy, straight out of a Jacobean drama, was carried through into the last of her attempts to do away with Amrito, the doctor.

On the last day of the Annual World Celebration of 85 (this being the highpoint of the official sannyas year when thousands of sannyasins from all over the world were packed into the Ranch) one of Sheela's cronies shadowed Amrito into the huge meditation hall. When he sat down on his own, she went over, leant forward as though to whisper something in his ear, whipped out a syringe and injected him smartly in the bottom. She fled while Amrito, from the moment the symptoms first hit him, just had time enough to get to his feet and lurch over to a couple of friends. Then he fell to the ground, doubling up and retching.

The doctor behaved with courage and presence of mind. He had to watch himself be handed over to the ashram medical staff, some of whom, as he must have realised at that very moment, were the same people who had just tried to kill him. There they were, Puja and the rest, whispering and filling up hypodermics all around him. It was pure Stephen King...They flew him off the Ranch to the nearest State hospital. For several hours he was on the verge of death, and for

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a couple of days his condition remained critical; then he recovered. Once again no trace of poison was revealed by any of the battery of tests to which he was subjected while he was in the State hospital.

This final attempt to kill Osho's doctor marked the climax of her madness. A few weeks later Sheela and her gang flew out of the Ranch, heading for Portland, then to Germany – taking with her, or so a few days later Osho was to insist, some 50 million dollars she had salted away in a Swiss bank account.

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The Fall of the Commune

All along, for anyone on the outside – for Asha and me, for instance, nursing a baby in a disintegrating London – it had seemed obvious one thing and one thing alone was going to happen to the Ranch: it was going to get busted.

Even if you took the commune at its face value, as an attempt to set up a model of an alternative society, then apart from anything else it was based on a disastrous political miscalculation. The wave of cultural and political revolt which had built up in the West in the early 60s and seemed to sweep all before it until some time in the mid 70s was, by the end of that decade, unmistakably on the ebb. The strength of

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Poona had come from its relative geographical isolation from this process; in Poona the 60s never ended. But when sannyas came back to the West in the early 80s end they did, and with a vengeance. Worldwide, 1980 ushered in a period of reaction which has continued unbroken until the present day. As a generation, it was as though we had tried everything, and everything had failed. It wasn't even just a lack of positive support for the commune;- there was a real desire, on the part of a great many people, to forget about anything remotely like that. The Ranch was out on a limb.

Even so, the scandal when it burst was beyond anything anyone had imagined.

There was a tunnel and secret bunker under Sheela's house. You got in through a false wall in the shower. There was a library of books on poisons and bacteriological and chemical warfare. An A-frame on a remote part of the Ranch had been used as a laboratory where Puja had, amongst other things, apparently been trying to culture the AIDS virus. The whole Ranch was bugged. Not just the hotel and public telephones – the entire place was wired. Osho's room was bugged, so was Vivek's. The tapping had been done with extraordinary, one could almost say loving, care; housewire had been removed from its outer plastic insulation and replaced by strands of telephone wire leading to the hidden mikes, and then the casing had been resealed; so that even if you checked all you would see was normal

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housewiring. The F.B.I. was very impressed by that. Osho was bugged by a tiny mike hidden inside an alarm buzzer Sheela had insisted he have.

Someone came forward to confess to the firebombing of the County Planning Office (this to try to destroy the records relating to the zoning of the Ranch) and to another plan, if plan is the right word, to crash a plane-load of bombs into a local courthouse. Worse still, from the point of view of the continued survival of the Ranch in Oregon, was the fact there had been a mass poisoning of ordinary people in the largest town in the area, a place called The Dalles. During the autumn of the previous year ten salad bars had been poisoned with salmonella bacteria by disguised sannyasins. Some 750 people had been taken ill, 45 of them needing hospitalization – though again no one actually died. This poisoning was, so it transpired, only a dummy run for a much larger one when they were going to infect the whole town's water supply with salmonella, the point of the operation – wait for it – being to keep everyone pinned on the lavatory with diarrhoea so that they could not vote in a key local election.

This was when Osho made a big mistake. He turned the matter over to the Oregon police, and within days the Ranch was swarming with every kind of journalist and law enforcement official, both state and federal. All along Osho maintained he had no idea that any of these things had been going on and, despite massive police attempts to prove his complicity, no connection between him and any of these

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events was ever found. (Personally it seems to me that the very fact he told the police about these events indicates they were news to him. Had he thought about the situation for even a short while he would have seen that nothing whatsoever would be gained by publicising them – the only thing that would happen was precisely what did happen, the police bust the commune wide open. Osho should have kept his mouth shut.)

The scandal went international. Osho gave a series of press conferences. He went on prime-time TV where, predictably enough, he went over the top about Christianity. “If it wasn’t for the Serpent” he assured the appalled Oregonians “you’d still be in Eden, chewing grass.” But he had lost the offensive and any attempt to regain it was doomed. Soon, or at least this is my impression, he was courting the media for a very different reason: because he realised how dangerous it was getting to be on the Ranch.

I don’t know whether Osho’s experiment had provoked God, but it had certainly provoked most everyone else. For hundreds of miles around people were doing something unpleasantly close to talking themselves into a lynching. The truth about the salmonella outbreak in The Dalles was out by then, and who can blame them? “Threats and demands that Bhagwan and his sannyasins leave the country poured in – some obscene, some invoking dire warnings and prophecies from the Bible, many simply threatening violence” writes Sue Appleton in her account of the last days of the Ranch. “Local

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ranchers and truck drivers drove through the city waving rifles and taking pot-shots at the sign posts. There was a definite feeling of a lynching in the offing."⁶⁷

Locals, understandably enough, were worried about just how many guns the sannyasins had – apart from ordinary rifles and handguns Sheela was known to have stockpiled an unknown quantity of Uzis and assault rifles. The National Guard was flown into The Dalles and put on full alert. Suddenly things began to look really ugly.

The danger was that if the police went to the Ranch to arrest Osho, then they were going to provoke armed resistance;- or, alternatively, that they were going to go to the Ranch with the express intention of doing just that. Either way things were edging towards a shoot-out. If that sounds paranoid then look at what happened to David Koresh and the fundamentalist 'Davidian' sect in Waco in East Texas in 93. The scenario was very similar to the Ranch. On the grounds that Koresh was stockpiling weapons their commune was surrounded by tanks and snipers, and for seven weeks a state of siege was undertaken. People were shot and killed on both sides. Finally the Davidians' compound was stormed with CS gas, tanks and assault rifles and in the holocaust which followed 75 people (50 adults including two pregnant women, and 25 children) were burned alive. Nobody made the slightest bit of fuss about this, either at the time or afterwards. Subsequent investigation failed to reveal any significant stockpiling of guns.

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In a move to de-escalate the situation at the Ranch, Osho decided that things would cool down if he personally were not present. There was no warrant issued for his arrest; and when he and a small group of sannyasins chartered two Lear jets to fly to North Carolina to go and stay with friends they were not breaking the law in any way.

That was when they flew into the police stake-out of the airport in Charlotte – and brings me back to the beginning of this story. They were all arrested and Osho was separated from everyone else, refused bail and after being held in custody for more than a week in Charlotte was put on the prison shuttle plane back to Oregon...and disappeared. But the evil guru caught as he tried to flee was nationwide news and within 48 hours the press had tracked Osho down to the state penitentiary in Oklahoma City. What he was doing there was never satisfactorily established, but sannyasins were so glad to have found him again they did not question the police account of administrative bungling.

Robes awry, shackled hand and foot with chains which looked like something from the Middle Ages, unwell but still cool as ever, Osho was promptly flown back to Oregon; and events moved quickly to their close.

Osho was in fact far from well; the filthy, TV-blaring underside of US justice seemed to have drained him physically. So much so that when he was finally charged – for immigration violations little more grave than a parking ticket

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– his lawyers were so worried he might be returned to custody while the police again refused bail that they urged him to plead guilty. This, apparently much against his will, he did.

Osho was fined half a million dollars, and banned from entry to the US for five years. He flew back to India that same night.

All in all, as he sat aboard the plane flying through the night to Delhi, I think Osho must have felt a great sense of relief.

In my understanding of his work, one of his major concerns all along was to prevent sannyas turning into a Church...to stop it being co-opted, commercialised and made to function as part of the norms of ego and State. Well, whatever else had happened, that possibility had been ruled out. Sannyas had been put beyond the pale, once and for all...The trouble was that the lesson had been far more violent than he had ever intended. What had gone wrong was that Osho's madness and Sheela's (at least to my mind) qualitatively different madness had been made to look as though they were one and the same thing. "I am talking" Nietzsche had said "about beyond good and evil – not beyond good and bad." The distinction was lost on most sannyasins in the wake of the Ranch, and understandably so: it looked as though they had fallen into the hands of a guru of almost disincarnate malevolence: as though he had brought enormous energy, plus millions of dollars, to proving what complete fools they all were.

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Sannyasins were to respond, over the following months, by dropping out in their droves. Psychotherapists were among the first – and certainly the noisiest – to go. Shiva's *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* came out at the same time as Osho was being paraded round in chains. I remember it being serialised, among the tits and bums, in an English Sunday newspaper. The book gave everybody the peg on which the whole story could be hung: Osho had possessed genuine psychic powers during his years in India, but once he got to the States he was 'corrupted by power.'

But in retrospect, all that seems beside the point...For what Osho didn't know that night, as he sat on the plane flying back to India, was that the feeling of being ill was not going to go away. On the contrary, over the following weeks and months, it was going to get worse and worse. So much so that, a short while later, he was going to say what was really happening that night was: he had just been murdered.

Part Two

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After his death, when I tried to come to grips with Osho again, I went back to the beginning and started with the meditations.

Osho's dynamic meditations revolve in a limbo all their own.

Amongst sannyasins they seem to be seen as a kind of introductory warming-up – as something essentially for beginners. 'Cathartic' the Poona therapists called them in the 70s, and the label has stuck. They bring repressed feelings into consciousness, where they can be explored. They clear the way; but if you want to go deeper psychotherapy

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groups and traditional sitting meditations have more cutting edge.

Perhaps the 70s therapists had quite correctly sensed a threat to...well...*business*. For, seen as psychotherapy, the first thing the dynamic meditations do is dispense with a therapist. You can do them on your own, or in a group of your own choosing, and the entire process is monitored by no one but yourself. How well they work may be open to question, but their orientation is not: they are an attempt to create a mass healing force, and one which by definition can never be monopolised by any particular group of psychotherapists. Though perhaps in all fairness one should add that this aspect to Osho's meditations did not begin to stand out clearly until the late 80s and early 90s – not until the appearance of raves, of partying, of dance culture, where you can see something strikingly similar to dynamic meditations appearing spontaneously on a mass level, as an instinctive search for healing.

From what I remembered it was only in his early lectures, those from Bombay before he had met many Westerners, that Osho discussed the dynamic meditations in any depth. They were 'scientific.' I remembered him saying that on a number of occasions; they were designed to do something specific, and if you did them wholeheartedly they would do it. At the time I had thought, O come on Bhagwan;- but as I began to reread those early books I was no longer so sure.

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Osho's Bombay lectures are much faster, much more incisive than his later ones. There is none of the implacable, quasi-hypnotic manner he was to develop in Poona; they don't space you out in the same way, there's a real sense of urgency to them...I reread *The Silent Explosion*, and then discovered another set of lectures, from 1970 and called *In Search of the Miraculous*, which seemed to be focused even more directly on what he was trying to do with the meditations.

In Search of the Miraculous is a lengthy lecture series. Printed up there are two volumes of it, and for Osho it is an unusually systematic introduction to Tantra. He is trying to put the whole thing in completely contemporary terms. Thus he says that 'Kundalini' energy is no more than the Tantric way of expressing basic life energy, *élan vital*; and the 'chakras'- and this was the bit which got me as I had always regarded the chakras as Indian philosophy at its most *kitsch* – are a sort of classification of the stages through which this life energy can pass. Tantra, he says, is first and foremost a theory of evolution.

The book opens with talks from an early meditation camp, one held in a place called Nargol, a resort somewhere on the coast slightly north of Bombay. Later I was to see film of the camp; Nargol was pretty much like Goa with everyone, and there were a surprising number of people there, sitting around on the sand in a huge palm grove. The simplicity of the decor was almost biblical. Osho had just invented the original Dynamic meditation – and was still tinkering around with it.

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As he explains it, the Dynamic's structure is far simpler than it was to become.

The meditation lasts only forty minutes, and consists of four ten-minute stages. Already the first stage is devoted to building up energy – raw physical energy; and already the technique used to do this is hyperventilation, though the breathing method at this stage is far simpler than it was to become in the finished version. It is more like *bastrika*, like traditional hatha yoga 'bellows breathing' – you breathe in as deeply as you can, you breathe out as fully as you can, you breathe in as deeply as you can, etc. etc.

The second stage is the same as the finished version. Go mad, but consciously. "Jump, dance, weep, shout, laugh, anything you like. Let out all the madness inside. Express what you feel completely."

Osho was leading the meditations at Nargol – pushing everybody with an energy which still leaps off the page.

Let go of the body. Let it cry if it wants to cry. Let it scream if it wants to scream. And let it yell if it wants to yell. Allow it in every way. Don't curb it, don't restrain it, don't resist it. Cooperate with whatever the body does.⁶⁸

This is the young Master in his Aerobics-from-Hell mode. For Osho looked very different then. His hair and beard were jet-black; he looked far wilder, far crazier, far more Rasputin-like. There's film of him leading one of his meditations from this time. People are jumping up and down, holding their arms above their heads (the jolt of their

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feet as they hit the ground ‘hammering the sex centre’ he said). Osho’s eyes are rolled back in his head, while he is making these upward gestures with his hands: Higher! Higher! He seems to be trying to push the physical body way beyond its normal limits.

Whatever happens to it allow it to happen fully. Let it happen, what happens to the body. It will turn into different mudras, gestures. It will whirl and whirl. Many things will happen, when the energy within will awaken. It may burst into loud shouts, screams and crying. Don’t worry at all. Let go...Let go of the body...⁶⁹

Certainly catharsis is part of this, but it is only part. There is something else which is far more important, something to do with side-stepping the physical body. “Let go...Let go of the body...” What Osho is trying to do is dislodge your normal sense of who you are.

This becomes the explicit purpose of the third stage of the meditation – which is very different from the final version of the Dynamic. Originally the third stage consisted of asking yourself, asking yourself with all the intensity you could summon up, the question “Who am I? “

Who am I? Who am I? Who am I? Madly ask the question, ‘Who am I? Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?’ Ask it with all your being, let the question reverberate through your whole being. ‘Who am I?’ Continue deep breathing, and let go of the body. Whatever happens to it, allow it. And ask, ‘Who am I? Who am I?’ Exert your utmost for ten minutes.⁷⁰

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The last ten minutes were total let-go. There was no Stop exercise, no freeze. You could either lie or stand or sit, whatever felt best...but just stay still.

This was the space in which meditation 'could' happen.

Drop everything. Drop asking, drop deep breathing, drop all activity...Let everything be still and quiet, quiet and empty...As if you are dead, as if you have disappeared. Only emptiness remains. Everything is quiet. Everything is peaceful. Everything is silent. It is in this silence that God comes...This emptiness is the gate through which he enters us. Await, just await... As if you are dead. As if you have disappeared...⁷¹

There is a theoretical dimension to this four-step structure. *In Search of the Miraculous* continues with a series of lectures Osho gave once he was back in Bombay. In these he launches into his account of what the chakras were really about.

They are not, Osho says, particularly esoteric at all. Essentially the first chakra just represents the physical body. This is called the *muladhar*, and is the first dimension of experience to appear. It is formed during the first seven years of life.

The second chakra, the *swadhishtan*, stands for the next stage of evolution – the growth of an emotional self. This is seen by Tantra as something close to an autonomous psychic system. Osho uses a number of different terms here, 'dimension,' 'plane,' 'level,' even 'sheath' (*sharir*), but the one he uses most often is simply 'body,' and I will stick with that.

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This second 'body' forms over the next great phase of life, from seven to fourteen, and with the attaining of sexual maturity is largely complete. It is, he says, very close to what is understood by the individual 'unconscious' in Freudian psychology.

The formation of these two bodies is the work of nature alone; and it is perfectly possible for people to be functioning on just these two levels, and never evolve into anything more complex. Such people would be living almost exclusively for food and sex. The growth of the third body, *manipur*, or the intellect, demands a certain level of leisure and civilisation. The capacity to reason – to remember and compare and project – can only be developed by education; a process which, in all its essential features, is complete by the time a person is twenty-one years of age.

According to Tantra, Osho continues, all three of these chakras, the body, the emotions and the mind, are polarised: they work through division into negative and positive. For instance *swadhishthan*, the emotional body, is divided into attraction and repulsion, into yes and no, into love and hate, and the two poles are always at war with one another. These are the dynamics of experience and, like other dialecticians before him, Osho stresses the importance of the role played by the negative pole. This is the key one for growth. All you have to do is to bring consciousness to 'negativity,' to watch, to witness it, and it will become 'positive' of its own accord. "If a person understands the nature of fear he attains fear-

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lessness, and if he understands the nature of violence he attains nonviolence. Similarly by understanding anger we develop the quality of forgiveness.”⁷²

Awareness is alchemical per se. The same applies to *manipur*, to the mind. It too is polarised, and the key role again is played by the negative pole. “Primarily” Osho says “the third body revolves around doubt and thinking. If these are transformed doubt becomes trust and thinking becomes *vivek*, awareness. If doubts are repressed you never attain to *shraddha*, trust, though we are advised to suppress doubts and to believe what we hear. He who represses his doubts never attains to trust, because doubt remains present within though repressed. It will creep within like a cancer.”⁷³

Body...emotions...mind...Put like that the chakras did not sound so off the wall. If anything there was an immemorial, almost peasant-like sturdiness to the idea. And, coming at it from this point of view, you could see straight away the lines along which Osho was structuring his own meditations. If you look at his original Dynamic each stage of the meditation is focused on one chakra or body – first the physical one, then the emotions, then the mind. Experimentally he was trying to go back over the course of an individual’s development, and to rectify – to revitalise, to make aware, to realign – its major features as he went.

How was it meant to work? Was it that each chakra in turn got a burst of energy fired at it – and then it was subse-

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quently 'tuned' to the others? Or was there was a single life force, a 'kundalini' energy which, if you provoked sufficient excess of it in the physical body, would 'rise' almost of its own accord to the emotions, and then to the mind?

Whichever way, the Dynamic was a rollercoaster ride through the first three chakras – one whose impetus catapulted you into the final let-go, in which meditation 'was possible.'

You could see that this was to become the basic template for all his later meditations. All work along much the same lines. The Kundalini meditation itself, probably the most popular of his meditations, is also the most straightforward in its structure. Again the meditation is divided into four stages, and each stage deals with one chakra or 'body'. In the first you shake. In the second you dance. In the third you witness. In the fourth you let go. Shaking relaxes the muscular contraction of the physical body, slowly releasing deep tensions and the energy bound into them – energy which is turned into something more celebratory, more expansive by the next stage, by the dance. The third stage tries to transmute this energy once more, transcending thought in an explicit openness to the present moment. "thinking becomes *vivek*, awareness." The last stage is the let-go.

Osho, though he didn't go out of his way to draw attention to it, could be perfectly candid about this basic format to his meditations. "Body, heart, mind – all my meditations move in the same way: they start from the body, they move through the heart, they reach to the mind – and then they go beyond."⁷⁴

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You can see a simple variation on this in another of his best-known meditations, the Nadabrahma. For the first half an hour you are to sit and hum quietly to yourself; for the second stage, which lasts fifteen minutes, you are to make a complex slow motion movement with the hands, a sort of moving *mudra*. The fine inner vibration of the humming loosens the muscular armour, the same way the shaking does in the Kundalini, only internally and more subtly; at the same time it reveals any contraction of the emotional self and coaxes it, very gently, to open up. What are two separate stages in the Kundalini, one for the body and one for the emotions, is a single double one here: both centres are worked on at one and the same time. The second stage is devoted to the third chakra: the slow-motion movement with the hands effectively steadies the mind in the present moment and holds it there, since you cannot do things in slow motion unconsciously. The last quarter of an hour is, as ever, the let-go.

Also, you could see why Osho had said that Gurdjieff was the most significant Tantric teacher of the twentieth century.

For Gurdjieff too had divided man into three distinct parts, though he called them 'centres' – or more often 'brains' – the physical, the emotional and the intellectual. Not only did Gurdjieff think that the chaos of our individual daily lives comes from the fact that these three 'brains' are not working in sync with one another – first one takes over,

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then another, then the first one again – but since, as a rule of thumb, each individual tends to be characterised by the predominance of one or another of the ‘brains’ – there are vitals, there are emotionals, there are intellectuals – humankind as a whole tended to break down into large mutually hostile groups, who basically failed to understand one another at all.

Furthermore, this situation has been compounded, and compounded disastrously, by the history of religion. There are whole traditions, like Hatha Yoga for instance, which revolve around the cultivation of the physical body alone. These Gurdjieff refers to, somewhat dryly, as *the way of the fakir*. There are other traditions which are primarily devotional and moral in tone, and based on experiencing the love of God; these Gurdjieff calls *the way of the monk*. Finally there are the intellectually oriented religions, those struggling to observe the nature of consciousness itself: *the way of the yogi*.

Gurdjieff insisted that these three great traditions had to be brought together and harmonised in the creation of what he called The Fourth Way. Chief among the many experiments by which he tried to do this was a series of sacred dances or ‘movements’ he choreographed and set to music – vivid, highly charged individual and group exercises, based on temple dances and meditations from the many traditions he had explored. These ‘movements’ were designed to bring energy and awareness to different parts of the being – in varying orders, and to different ends.

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Likewise Osho's meditations are not all designed to do the same thing. When he said "All my meditations move in the same way" this is not entirely so. All start, it is true, with building up energy in the physical body – but they don't all do the same thing with it, once it has been generated. Look, for instance, at the Nataraj, the dancing meditation. There is 40 minutes dancing, then 20 minutes let-go, then a final five minutes dance. There is no witnessing, no third chakra stage whatsoever. Or look at the Gourishankar. That was the late-night one during the ten-day meditation camps in Poona, the one all the druggies headed for. Quarter of an hour of *pranayama*; quarter of an hour staring fixedly at a stroboscopic light synchronised with the heartbeat; quarter of an hour of Subud's *latihan*; and then the let-go. Through what adventures does that put a burst of energy?

Looked at it in terms of world culture both Gurdjieff and Osho have started to trailblaze some entirely new territory. Their 'movements' or meditations are at once a finely crafted celebration and a sort of inner lab space where you can begin to come to grips with your own nature. They are a rediscovery of the dynamics of ceremony, and their exploration as something most resembling a new art-form – but an art-form which has broken decisively with the commodity-based preconceptions of contemporary Western culture. What both men left behind isn't something you consume, it is something you *do*...

But back to Osho's account of the chakras. If, then, the energy of these first three chakras was stepped up and tuned

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to one another, what would happen? What was meant to take place in the last stages of any of his meditations – during the freeze in the Dynamic in its final form, or during the let-go in the Kundalini or the Nadabrahma? As you lay there, your head still spinning, after the Nataraj?

“Await, just await...As if you are dead. As if you have disappeared...”

What was meant to happen in that inner emptiness?

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The Chakras *(continued)*

If we lived in a sane society, at around the age of twenty-one, when the intellect is fully formed, another dimension to human existence should begin to open up. This, in Tantra, is symbolised by *anahat*, the fourth chakra. Conventionally *anahat* is the 'heart' chakra, though Osho's approach to it has little to do with what is normally understood by emotion. Initially he seems to be treating it as a sort of hold-all for the 'occult'. Activation of the fourth chakra is, he says, characterised by the appearance of paranormal powers.

Hypnotism, telepathy, clairvoyance, are all the potential of the fourth body. Persons can have contact with one another without hindrances from time or place;

The Chakras (continued)

they can read the thoughts of another without asking or project thoughts into another. A person can travel outside of his body; he can do astral projection and know himself apart from the physical body.⁷⁵

This is something very different from the note Osho was to strike in his lectures to Westerners during the 70s. I suspect most of us were completely blocked about this kind of thing. Osho says this is, in fact, the typical response to it:

Those who made use of this body were always condemned and slandered. Hundreds of women were branded as witches and burnt in Europe because they used the faculties of the fourth body. Hundreds who practised Tantra were killed in India because of the fourth body. They knew some secrets that seemed dangerous to human beings. They knew what was taking place in your mind; they knew where things were placed in your house without ever having stepped into it. So the realm of the fourth body was looked upon as 'black' art all over the world, as one never knew what might happen. We have always tried our best to stop progress from going any further than the third body because the fourth has always seemed very dangerous.

There are hazards, but together with these there are wonderful gains. So instead of stopping, research was necessary. Then we could have found ways of testing the validity of our experiences.⁷⁶

I remembered reading accounts of Western mysticism where in between 'renouncing the world,' which was called 'Purgation,' and becoming one with God, or 'Union,' there

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was an in-between stage which partook of both spheres. Commonly this was called 'Illumination.' In this stage there could be deep religious experiences, but they hadn't yet settled into an entirely new psyche; and among these experiences there were sudden eruptions of a lot of the things Osho ascribed to his fourth body. Saints were always going off into raptures and trances; they saw visions and they heard voices; in certain cases they developed healing powers, or could perform miracles. Normally, within the Western contemplative tradition, the advice given was to pay no attention to such phenomena because they were distractions from the quest for God, and the ego could very easily regroup itself around any attempt to cultivate or explore these paranormal powers.

Needless to say, Osho does not agree – or not in any simple-minded way. Not only does he endorse, with his customary enthusiasm, all such accounts of 'illumination'...you can hear music which no one else can hear...you can smell perfumes...you can see gods and goddesses...you can travel to heavens and hells...you can effect miracles...all of this is perfectly possible. But it isn't just a question of exploring paranormal capacities, wild talents latent within us; it's much more than that. These powers are aspects of an entirely different *body*. They are the first features, or glimpses, of an entirely different self.

The difficulty with Osho's descriptions of this, the fourth body, is that he keeps coming at it from a different angle. In one talk it's one thing, in another it's something else.

The Chakras (continued)

Frequently his tone is manic. At times he appears to be describing a sort of devotional, 'Sufi' mysticism, an apotheosis of the I-Thou; at others something more shamanic, more like the spaces which can be accessed by psychedelics; at others again something much more recognisable, as though *anahat* were the matrix of all human 'culture,' the driving force behind all artistic and scientific creativity: a visionary capacity which starts to flicker into life as soon as a society becomes stable and leisured...

What, then, is the common denominator for all these things? If the first body is the physical one, the second the emotions, and the third the mind – then what is the fourth? If there is one word Osho keeps using in this context it is... *vision*. The fourth body is visionary. At its heart is imagination.

"Vision" he says "means seeing and hearing things without the use of the usual sense organs. The limitations of time and space are no more for a person who develops vision."⁷⁷ Perhaps this would take in both the ESP dimension to the heart chakra, and the more artistic, or scientific, elements of creative breakthrough which seem to be equally associated with it. *Anahat*, Osho seems to be saying, revolves around intuition. The heart imagines the truth. "What is now proved was once only imagin'd" said Blake – who, in Osho's terms, would be as fourth body a character as you could hope to meet... But the whole concept of the fourth body remains the least explored of all the chakras in these lectures.

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The next chakra, in comparison, is far simpler and clearer. This is the fifth chakra, *visuddhi*. Traditionally it is located in the throat; and according to Osho is the locus of the classic 'enlightenment' experience.

How can one tell the difference between a person who has entered the fifth body and one who has not? The difference will be that he who has entered the fifth body is completely rid of all unconsciousness.

People appear to be waking. When you come home every evening the car turns left into your gate; you apply the break when you reach the porch. Do not be under the illusion that you are doing all this consciously. It happens unconsciously by sheer force of habit. It is only in certain moments, moments of great danger, that we really come into alertness. When the danger is so much that it will not do to go about lacking awareness, we awaken. For instance, if a man puts a knife at your chest you jump into consciousness. The point of the knife for a moment takes you right up to the fifth body. With the exception of these few moments in our lives we live like somnambulists.⁷⁸

This is something totally at odds with the preceding stage. Far from the esoteric, almost hot-house quality of the fourth chakra, there is no longer any real interest in experience per se. This chakra is purely about being; and by the same token it is about the utterly ordinary. This is, though Osho does not emphasise it here, the world of Zen.

A sleeping man does not know who he is, so he is always striving to show others that he is this or that. This is his lifelong endeavour. He tries in a thousand

The Chakras (continued)

ways to prove himself. Sometimes he climbs the ladder of politics and declares, 'I am so and so.' Sometimes he builds a house and displays his wealth, or he climbs a mountain and displays his strength. He tries in all ways to prove himself. And in all these efforts he is in fact unknowingly trying to find out for himself who he is. He knows not who he is.

Before crossing the fourth plane we cannot find the answer. The fifth body is called the spiritual body because there you get the answer to the quest for 'Who am I?' The call of the 'I' stops once and for all on this plane; the claim to be someone special vanishes immediately. If you say to such a person, 'You are so and so,' he will laugh. All claims from his side will now stop, because now he knows. There is no longer any need to prove himself, because who he is is now a proven fact.⁷⁹

Body...Heart...Mind...Vision...Enlightenment...How seriously is Osho taking all this? How literally? Is he really putting this forward as an account of human evolution? Or is there a tongue-in-cheek quality about it? Is he having a go at a space opera of his own, like Gurdjieff's *All And Everything*? Perhaps that's part of it yet, at the same time, this is not something he mentions just once or twice; on the contrary, he returns repeatedly to this idea of the seven bodies throughout his early lectures. *In Search of the Miraculous* was in fact Osho's first major book, and the only one to be published by a normal commercial publisher, by Benarsidas of Delhi. I remembered it being around Poona when we first

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went there, but it had disappeared under the flood of his later books, and gone out of print.

Was he really putting this forward as an account of evolution?...A sort of corroboration of what Osho was saying came from an unexpected quarter: from LSD research. While I was writing this I remembered having read a similar breakdown of experience in Stanislav Grof's classic account of LSD experience, *Realms of the Human Unconscious*. Grof, from a mass of clinical data extending over seventeen years, suggested that individual response to the drug could be broken down into four broad categories.

A fairly low dose – which Grof pegs at around 100 micrograms – results in what everyone has come to expect of an LSD 'trip.' There's a rush of energy and a marked heightening of the senses, the effects on sight being the most striking. The world can take on a fairytale-like beauty; or go Cubist; or grotesquely comic. But not just sight, all the senses tend to be affected. Frequently his patients told him that their trip was the first time they had ever *really* heard music; and the power of LSD as an aphrodisiac is well-known. These phenomena Grof refers to as the 'abstract' or 'aesthetic' realm.

However a higher dose, say 200 to 300 micrograms, produces a markedly different experience.

Instead of affecting the body it affects the emotions. This, the second of Grof's 'realms,' and which he calls the 'psychodynamic,' was the focus of all his own early interest in LSD. Originally he had been part of a State project in Prague

The Chakras (continued)

in the late 50s where they had been exploring the use of LSD as an adjunct to traditional, largely Freudian psychoanalysis. What they did was blindfold the patient, have them lie down on a couch, and inject the acid intravenously. All the energy shot inside. The patient went into spaces which were very close to dreams, only while remaining fully conscious; later, as the analysis went deeper, the key trauma themselves exploded into awareness, and were relieved.

Grof was administering these high-dose sessions to patients once a week for months, even years, on end; and in the measure he traced individual neuroses back to their source he began to uncover a range of phenomena of a quite different order. These, which he says constitute a third great realm he calls, not very snappily, the 'perinatal' – understanding by that a conscious reliving of the most basic human experience of all, the experience before, during and immediately after physical birth.

This is what a 'bad trip' is. What is happening when an LSD trip gets terrifying is that memory of the birth trauma is breaking through. At this point Grof had me sitting up in my chair. The phenomena he described in this context, the sense of being trapped, and physically tortured, in a nightmare which not only has no end, but which doesn't have any time to it at all, were perfectly in accord with my own bad acid trips... Also associated with this 'realm' are recollections of the oceanic bliss of life in the womb, and of the actual experience of birth itself.

While Grof's first two categories, the body and the

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emotions, are perfectly in accord with Osho's map, there seems to be a disparity here. There is however, if you look more closely, at least a significant overlap. Isn't the shock of birth essentially that of not knowing who you are or what is happening to you – and the terror this brings about? Certainly that was happening to me on my bad acid trips;- and I think Osho was making the same point when, in his original version of the Dynamic meditation, he made work with the question Who Am I? the key to opening the third chakra.

Be that as it may, with Grof's fourth and final class of LSD experiences – which he calls 'the transpersonal' – his account is again totally congruent with Osho's. "The common denominator of this otherwise rich and ramified group of phenomena is the feeling of the individual that his consciousness expanded beyond the usual ego boundaries and limitations of time and space."⁸⁰ Just as with Osho there are experiences of ESP, of precognition, clairvoyance and clairaudience. The I-Thou is enormously potentiated; there are experiences of what Grof calls 'dual unity,' where you appear to become one with another person. Memories of other life forms surface...There is a particular authenticity to the amazing case-histories Grof details. As an initially orthodox Freudian, and presumably largely orthodox Marxist, he himself did everything he could to deny the conclusions he was forced to reach.

Particularly close to Osho is Grof's assertion that any one 'realm' can only be opened up by living through the preceding one totally:

The Chakras (continued)

In the process of consecutive LSD sessions, the major experiential focus tends to shift, by and large, from abstract and psychodynamic elements to the problems of death and rebirth, and eventually to various transpersonal experiences. Advanced LSD sessions are usually dominated by mystical and religious themes and are all transpersonal in nature; elements of the levels worked through in earlier sessions do not reappear in this stage.⁸¹

Trying to summarise the nature of LSD Grof came up with his celebrated phrase that LSD was a “non-specific amplifier of the unconscious,” something the nature of which depended upon the set and setting in which it was employed. This definition brings LSD close to what Osho was talking about with Kundalini – pure energy, energy per se, an *élan vital* whose expression depends on the form it is flooding... More than that one cannot at present say. All, or anyone else’s, exploration of the potential of LSD was repressed by the ban on all research into psychedelics which was part and parcel of the repression of the 60s and 70s attempt to form an alternative culture. It should, and hopefully will, be taken up as one of the most obvious areas of research in what Osho, during the final phase of his work, was to call a Mystery School.

But I have raced ahead of myself here. At this point of *In Search of the Miraculous* Osho makes a number of other distinctions. In fact there are still two more chakras to go.

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The Chakras (continued)

For Osho, individual enlightenment is far from being the end of human evolution.

Osho is emphatic about this. 'Enlightenment' as he describes it is not the Alpha and Omega of spiritual life. In fact rather than talk about enlightenment it would be more accurate to call it 'self realisation' – *atma gyan* he calls it, knowledge of the self – a self-realisation which consists quite specifically of finally discovering who, or what, one is.

The problem is the ecstasy discovering this brings.

The conflicts and problems of the individual end on the fifth plane. But this plane has its own hazards. You have come to know yourself, and this knowing is so

The Chakras (continued)

blissful and fulfilling that you may want to terminate your journey here. You may not feel like continuing on. The hazards that were up to now were all of pain and agony; now the hazards that begin are of bliss.⁸²

You know the still point – but you still don't know the whole. You know who you are – but you still don't know God. Osho says there are whole religious traditions which got stuck at this stage of evolution; he points in particular to the Jainas, who said that there was a self, a self which was eternal, but no God.

Sooner or later there will be a need to tear oneself free of this bliss. Sooner or later there will be a need to proceed from *atma gyan*, from knowledge of the self, to the next chakra, to the next great stage of experience – *brahma gyan*, the knowledge of God, the knowledge of the whole.

If, Osho says, our basic experience of being alive can be summed up in the phrase "I am," then the enlightenment experience could be described as the disappearance of the word 'I' – leaving in its place only the sense of 'am,' the perception of being. But this perception itself, the sense of 'am' has to be transcended if one is to continue.

What then will be the nature of the sixth body?

Is-ness will be felt; tathata, suchness will be felt. Nowhere will there be the feeling of I or of am; only that which remains. So here will be the perception of reality, of being – the perception of consciousness. But here the consciousness is free of me; it is no longer my consciousness. It is only consciousness – no longer my existence, but only existence.⁸³

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This is the sixth chakra, *agya*, the sixth body, which Osho calls the 'cosmic body.' If I've got my Buddhism right this is also the *parinirvana* spoken of in the Mahayana – the 'beyond nirvana,' the 'beyond enlightenment' – the further shore the Buddha's own meditation finally reached, a deeper, more comprehensive understanding than his initial breakthrough under the Bodhi tree.

Such a person, if he remains, will become God. Such a consciousness if it travels for long will be worshipped by millions; prayers will be offered to him. Those whom we call an avatar, Ishwara, son of God, tirthankara, are those who have entered the sixth plane from the fifth. They can remain in that plane for as long as they wish and they can be of great help. Such persons are forever striving and working for others to travel through the preceding journey. Those who have the slightest feel of such persons cannot place them anywhere lower than Bhagwan, the blessed one. Bhagwan they are: there is nothing lacking in their being Bhagwan because they have attained the sixth, cosmic body.

In this very life it is possible to enter the sixth plane through the fifth. Whenever anyone enters the sixth in this life we call him a Buddha or a Mahavira or a Rama or a Krishna or a Christ. And those who perceive them as such look upon them as God.⁸⁴

Words, and Osho has been repeating this for some time already, cannot possibly convey the reality of any of this. However there is still one further experience remaining – *sahasrar*, the seventh and last chakra. This is the ultimate

The Chakras (continued)

‘mystical’ experience, the final death of the self. “Brahman is the ultimate obstacle – the last barrier in the ultimate quest of the seeker...Nonbeing has yet to be realized. The being, the is-ness, is known, but the nonbeing has yet to be realized – that which is not still remains to be known.”⁸⁵

News about the Brahman has been reported, but what is conveyed beyond it is bound to be negative – as was that which was told by Buddha. Buddha tried his hardest to express the seventh plane. Therefore, all that he conveys is denial, all that he conveys is negation, and so it did not come within the understanding of the people of his land. The experience of the Brahman, being positive, was well understood by the people. The Brahman was said to be *sat – chit – ananda* – truth, consciousness, bliss – and these positive assertions were well understood. One could say about it that this is, that is, but Buddha talked about that which is not. Perhaps he is the only one who worked hard to make the seventh plane known.

Buddha was not accepted in this country because the place he talked of is without roots, forms or shapes...Buddha said, “You will not be...”⁸⁶

Well, that’s it. That’s the whole seven chakras: Osho’s *Tantric Varieties of Religious Experience*. So to ask the same question once more: how seriously was he taking it? What role does this early schema play in his work as a whole?

Firstly, I am not suggesting, in any sense, that this is what Osho’s teaching is *really* about. I am trying to do some-

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thing more specific, and more modest than that. If the first part of this book was an attempt to show that biographically Osho's life makes sense, that he didn't go mad or off the rails in the US, then this second part is to suggest that he didn't contradict himself the whole time, which is what people are always saying;- that, on the contrary, behind all the things he said there is a coherent, if highly dialectical, philosophy. What this gloss on the chakras offers is a rare glimpse of the organic unity of his thought as a whole.

Body...Emotions...Mind...Vision...Enlightenment... God... Void... It's an image of ascent: of an evolutionary ladder, in which any one step can only be truly left behind by living through it totally. You can sense its presence behind his mature work; those early lectures are like an X-ray of the whole, you can see the inner articulation, the shadowy vertebra. Details of the stages may shift, but the conceptual backbone keeps showing through. Not always in 7s, by any manner of means, but always in an ascending series. Remember his Love One, Love Two and Love Three from 70s Poona;- and you could probably coax that into a series of chakras if you chose to try.

Look, in fact, at something as typically Poona of the *belle époque* as his teaching on Love. In a short lecture entitled "Sex, Love, Prayer and Meditation" collected in *The Silent Explosion* he puts his basic ideas forward without any attempt at window-dressing.

The Chakras (continued)

The Western concept of love, he says, comes down to the idea you 'fall in love' with someone, and then you go to bed with them. In the first place, this is the wrong way round. You would do better to have sex with someone first, and fall in love with them later. For, he argues, if you become meditative during sex you will begin to feel friendship, you will begin to feel compassion, you will begin to feel love; and this love will be stable, not just based on the glamour of a body you desire. Further, if you don't stop there and identify with the love, but continue to witness, now on this much subtler and finer state, on love itself, you will begin to experience what Osho calls *prayer*. Now you begin to see through the other to the whole: the beloved becomes a door to God. This isn't really personal any more, but there is still a sense of separation. If however you can witness this, witness prayer in its turn – and this for the lover or devotee is the hardest thing of all – then you will be on the verge of enlightenment...

It is this insistence you can only transcend something by living through it fully which gives Osho's philosophy its uniquely all-embracing quality. There's an extraordinary respect for the whole of creation suffusing it. "Remain true to the earth" said Nietzsche; and Osho did just that. His whole concept of meditation is built from the ground up. Each stage is reached by becoming conscious of the preceding one, and in this evolution no step is inherently more privileged than any other. For Osho's vision is not just about

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getting enlightened. It's about the whole process, the passion and intelligence of the whole life leading up to realisation – body, emotion, mind and creative imagination.

In the old days Osho was always going on about how much faster his meditations were than traditional ones – all that stuff about bullock carts and jet planes he told me at my first darshan. Personally I'm not sure about that at all; at times I suspect they may be even slower; but what I am sure about is this: they are far more *thorough*. What Osho built, he built to last.

27

Return to Poona

When Osho stepped off the plane from the US in Delhi airport he was greeted by the Indians like returning royalty. His problems must have seemed to be over. Fighting his way through a sea of journalists, he travelled into the Himalayas north of Delhi, up into Himachal Pradesh, up to Manali. (Though already, in Indian terms, this was a distinctly provocative destination to choose. Long synonymous with the strongest hashish on the market, Manali was full of Hippies, and the dope capital of North India.) There, along with his small household, Vivek, his doctor and a few others, he announced he intended to start a new ashram and resume his teaching.

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Far from being shaken by his experience in US jails Osho seemed to be more stropky than ever. The first morning he got up in Manali, he was off.

“Bhagwan placed one hand on his hip and with the other, began pointing to various sites in the grounds...The mountain across from the river would be purchased and a bridge built over to it. A second bridge would be constructed to enable sannyasins access to the island Laxmi had described to him, which would be used for meditation. ‘And in that corner over there,’ he said, gesturing, ‘we’ll make a small hotel for my people...’”⁸⁷ If anything he seems to have been manic. A few days later he said he wanted to buy an atoll in the South Pacific Marlon Brando was trying to sell. The island could be made much bigger by the addition of houseboats and floating gardens. By now well into his Toad-of-Toad-Hall mode the Master began to think an ocean-going liner could prove the answer to his problems. Still later he talked of the coming civilisation. He spoke of cities in the air.

In the midst of this the US government suddenly struck.

Somehow the White House had put pressure on the Indian government and when Osho’s household, Vivek, his new secretary and the rest of them, applied for extensions to their visas they were summarily refused – thus, after only a few weeks, effectively forcing Osho to leave India again.

The group flew to Kathmandu, where the same scenario was repeated.

Return to Poona

No sooner had Osho settled in and started to lecture than the Nepalese government refused to renew any of his party's visas. At this point Osho tried to adopt an entirely different strategy, something more akin to the teaching methods of another revolutionary, the peripatetic Krishnamurti – to wander round the world on his own, giving public lectures in short bursts, seeing individuals and small groups on an intimate basis, never stopping long in any one place; and accordingly when the group were refused extensions of their Nepalese visas they all flew to Crete, where Osho had let it be known in advance that he would be speaking in public.

Sannyasins from all over the world began to converge on the island – and once again the long arm of the US government was stretched out. Whatever you may think about the subsequent allegations of murder (and the story as it develops gets increasingly complex) there does not appear to be any doubt about the continuing, and almost incomprehensibly vicious, persecution of Osho by the Reagan administration. After a fortnight in Crete armed police broke into the villa where he was staying, arrested him, again without a warrant, took him to Athens, and told him to leave Greece immediately.

Osho's party rented a private jet and took off from Athens airport without any idea where they were heading. They had contacts in Switzerland so they decided to fly there, but when they landed Osho was not allowed out of the airport; so they took off again and flew to Sweden, where exactly the same thing happened. Beginning to panic they flew to

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Heathrow where they were allowed to stay overnight, but only because the pilot was not allowed by law to fly any further without sleeping. Osho spent the night in a police holding cell at Heathrow, and in the morning they flew on to Ireland. There they were allowed to stay for a few days, in a hotel in Limerick, guarded by the police, and that only because there was literally nowhere else Osho could go.

Holland, Germany and Italy all refused visas in rapid succession – Canada going so far as to refuse even to allow his plane to land and refuel there. It's a strange image of persecution, the prophet driven not into the wilderness, but up into the air, circling the earth, unable to come down. Osho seems to have got the message early on, and spent most of the time asleep, curled up on the seats in the back like a child on a long car-ride.

Finally Uruguay offered him a visa, and the group flew there, refuelling in Senegal, which at least allowed them to do that much. At first it looked as though he was going to be able to stay in Uruguay and the lectures he began to give there, of both an intimate and an unusually esoteric nature for his work with Westerners, give a taste of what he was starting to call a 'Mystery School'. Where this might have led he never had time to explore as the same scenario was repeated once more, and after three months he had to leave Uruguay.

Jamaica gave him a visa and cancelled it the day after he landed. Then he flew to Lisbon via Madrid, somehow giving everyone the slip in the transit, and for several weeks he and

his small group remained undisturbed in Portugal...and then one morning the police turned up again. At this point Osho said he was going back to India; and that was that. All in all, 21 countries had either refused him entry or deported him.

In retrospect, however, you can see something far more disturbing beginning to happen. Osho was showing signs of nagging ill health. At first he seemed to be suffering from a series of unrelated minor complaints. He was finding it difficult to sleep, he had little or no appetite, and frequently he felt nauseous. From time to time a strange tingling appeared all over his body, and his arms began to ache. Then he started to have trouble with his eyes.

At the time this was all put down to stress from the chaotic nature of his life since the break-up of the Ranch. But, far from clearing up, by the time Osho finally returned to India, first to Bombay, then in early 87, back to Poona and the Koregaon Park ashram, these complaints had become a lodged condition.

None of this was apparent to anyone except those closest to Osho. All you could see from the outside was a massive burst of energy to get the old Koregaon Park ashram running again. The buildings were dilapidated, the gardens bare and dusty as any other Indian compound from the years Osho had been away, and during those first months he singlehandedly set about rebuilding the positive charge of sannyas.

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The year of persecution seemed to have left him in an unusually realistic frame of mind. By no means was it over. Literally within a matter of hours of his arriving in Poona the Indian police burst into his bedroom brandishing a writ by which they hoped to ban him from living in the city. While inside the ashram sannyasins were rebuilding furiously outside the gates there were government bulldozers drawn up and just waiting for the order to drive in and flatten it. Indian embassies world-wide refused tourist visas to anyone suspected of sannyas, and all incoming passports at Bombay were checked against lists of known sannyasins. If detected sannyasins were held in custody and put on the next flight back to wherever they had come from.

Osho had no alternative but to play down the swash-buckling, 'international zone' quality of old Poona. Instead he began to call the ashram a 'university'; a New Age university – a campus where all the techniques of self-transformation existing in the world were gathered in one place, and structured as a series of courses. The old Poona groups were replaced by others less psychologically and sexually threatening, though essentially they were serving the same functions. They brought people together in extreme conditions. They were just camouflaged academically...Had the Ranch survived it seems these were the lines along which he had intended to run it. The other idea already mooted in Oregon, and which was perhaps an even more impertinent way of dressing up heresy in a socially acceptable form, was to market it as...a tourist resort.

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In videos of the lectures he was giving at the time he does not, so far as I can see, show any sign of being seriously ill. He looks much older though, and oddly puffy. He seems more distant. His delivery is much slower. He wears dark glasses, his grey beard is long and fine, he has settled into a more elegant, more restrained style of robe: almost always he now wears black. This is the Master in his Mafia Don mode. Stepping out of the latest Rolls, he is the spiritual gangster *par excellence*. He fits into no recognisable category of any sort...Certainly he had lost none of his capacity to wind people up. While, on the one hand, he was trying to give the ashram some appearance of academic credibility, on the other he could not resist flaunting his taste for nitrous oxide. Apparently (and he must have been at least conniving in spreading these) this had now reached Gargantuan proportions. You get the idea there were canisters lined up outside the backdoor of Lao Tzu House like empty milkbottles.

Behind the scenes a lot of other sannyasins were still well into the drug culture. When they had trailed off the Ranch in late 85, literally emptyhanded in many cases, many had drifted down to California and, panhandling there, run into widespread use of Ecstasy. Strangely the drug still hadn't made it across the Atlantic – a situation sannyasins were to remedy, and with considerable brio, over the next few years. While Ecstasy dealing never became as massive as smuggling hashish had been in the 70s (though there was talk of clandestine sannyas labs, one in Yucatan, another in

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Holland) it brought some of the glamour, the rags-to-riches quality back into sannyas.

Looked at from the point of view of someone living in London during those increasingly dreary, Yuppified years of the 80s, Osho seemed to be the only rebel left in the world. All the rest had buckled under, and conformed; the Hippies, the feminists, the student radicals, all slinking off to jobs in the media or the universities, like whipped dogs with their tails between their legs. Krishnamurti was dead; and Da Free John, who was Osho's only equal in spiritual power, was tucked away on his island in the Pacific with a handful of disciples. Osho was alone – but he was tireless, and he was incorrigible. Stories came down the grapevine. Osho was going to get a satellite and beam his lectures at mainland China...Osho had challenged the Pope to public debate... Osho was in touch with Gorbachev and was trying to get a large area of land in Russia to build a still bigger commune... Had he lived I think he might have rallied a growing number of people, and even done something to turn the tide. The late 80s rave scene was just picking up, and sannyasins could have done a lot more in that world than just push drugs. Merely the concept of meditation could have opened the whole thing up. If that had been done early enough raves and the dance culture would never have been co-opted and commercialised with the facility with which they were.

So at what point did Osho first suspect he had been poisoned?

Or perhaps there are two different questions here. When did he first suspect he had been poisoned – and when did he first suspect that the dose had been lethal?

For everyone around Osho, or so the ashram story goes, had expected him to recover his health once he was back in Poona, and leading a settled life again. But no such thing happened. “He was still sleeping only with difficulty” his doctor wrote later. “The bone pains, the balance problems, the tingling all remained unchanged. His eyesight continued to deteriorate...He was forced to abandon his daily discourses for several periods of time, remaining in his room for days on end unable even to pull himself up from his chair.”⁸⁸ To this was added another symptom. His hair began to fall out.

Osho was still only in his mid fifties; he was a powerfully built man and, while his body had always been sensitive (he was asthmatic and diabetic, though both conditions were very largely under control) he had never been weak or sickly. On the contrary, as anyone who saw him can testify, he had always radiated enormous vitality.

Then, towards the end of 87, just as Poona was really beginning to boom again, things came to a head. A minor ear infection resisted all treatment, and despite every kind of antibiotic, and even minor surgery, continued to spread and get worse. Poona’s top ENT specialist said he couldn’t understand what was happening, but Osho’s body seemed to be

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losing all resistance to infection. Absurd as it may sound this insignificant infection came close to killing him. Osho's own doctor, by this time really alarmed, insisted that Osho be examined properly. Specimens of Osho's blood, hair and urine, plus X-rays of the shoulder and arm joints, which by now were intermittently agonising, were flown to London.

28

“A Certain Sauce – Tasteless, Odourless...”

On November 6th 1987, after slowly recovering from this illness, Osho came to Buddha Hall and gave a lecture saying he believed he had been poisoned.

Osho returned to the circumstances of his imprisonment in the US. Why, he asked, had he been arrested? Why had he been refused bail – a bail which in such cases was all but mandatory? Why was he shunted round so many jails? Why in secret?

“I was taken from one jail to another jail” he said. “In twelve days I had to pass through six jails, all over America.”

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“In Oklahoma my suspicion became a certainty, because I landed in the middle of the night at a silent airport, and the U.S. Marshal himself was there to take charge of me. He himself was driving the car, I was sitting behind him. The man who was giving the charge over to him whispered in his ear – which I could hear without any effort, I was just behind him. He said, ‘This guy is world-famous and all the world news media is focused on him, so don’t do anything directly. Be very careful.’

“I started thinking, What is their intention? What do they want to do indirectly? And as I reached the jail their intention became very clear to me.

“The U.S. Marshal asked me not to fill in the form with my own name. I should write instead, ‘David Washington’ as my name. I said, ‘According to what law or constitution are you asking me to do such a stupid thing? I simply refuse, because I am not David Washington.’

“He insisted, and he said, ‘If you don’t sign the name ‘Washington’ you will have to sit in this cold night on this hard steel bench’...

“The idea was that if I write David Washington and sign David Washington, I can be killed, poisoned, shot and there will be no proof that I ever entered the jail. I was brought from the back door of the airport, I entered the jail also from the back door, in the middle of the night so that nobody can be ever aware – and only the U.S. Marshal was present in the office, nobody else.”

“A Certain Sauce – Tasteless, Odourless...”

Osho went on to say that he signed under the name of Washington, but signed it with his own flamboyant and indecipherable signature. (All this was later corroborated. An ashram lawyer, going through the records at the Oklahoma City Jail, found a copy of the document buried somewhere in the files, made out as Osho had said in the name of David Washington, but with Osho’s signature tippexed out).

Osho continued:

“He took me to the cell and told me to take one of the mattresses, utterly dirty, full of cockroaches. I said to him, ‘I am not a prisoner. You should behave a little more humanly. And I will need a blanket and a pillow.’

“And he simply refused: ‘No blanket, no pillow. This is all you will get.’ And he locked the door of that small, dirty cabin.

“Strangely enough, in the early morning at five o’clock he opened the door and he was a completely changed man. I could not believe my eyes, because he had brought a new mattress, a blanket, a pillow. I said, ‘But in the night you were behaving in such a primitive way. Suddenly you have become so civilized.’

“And he offered me breakfast early in the morning – five o’clock. In no other jail I was offered breakfast before nine o’clock. I said, ‘It is too early – and why are you paying so much attention?’

“But he said, ‘You have to eat it quick, because within five minutes we have to leave for the airport.’

“I said, ‘Then what is the purpose of the mattress and the blanket and the pillow?’

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“He said nothing and simply closed the door. The breakfast was not much: just two slices of bread soaked in a certain sauce – I could not figure out what it was – tasteless, odourless.

“Now, Dr. Amrito feels I was poisoned. Perhaps they poisoned me in all the six jails; that was the purpose of not giving me bail and that was the purpose in taking twelve days to complete a journey of six hours. A slow poisoning which will not kill me immediately, but in the long run it will make me weak – and it has made me weak.

“Since those twelve days in the American prisons, all sleep has disappeared. Many things started to happen in the body which were not happening before: disappearance of all appetite, food seeming to be absolutely without taste, a churning feeling in the stomach, nausea, a desire to vomit... no feeling of thirst, but a tremendous sense as if one is uprooted.

“Something in the nervous system also seems to have been affected. At times there has been a sensation of tingling all over the body which was very strong – particularly in both my hands – and a twitching of the eyelids.”⁸⁹

The tests on Osho’s blood and hair and urine did not, however, prove conclusive. What they did do was rule out the possibility of any known organic disease, including AIDS, but beyond that they could only indicate certain possibilities. Apparently not many things could have brought about the particular set of symptoms Osho was suffering from: in fact it

“A Certain Sauce – Tasteless, Odourless...”

came down to exposure to radioactivity, or alternatively to poison. If the latter, and two symptoms in particular – the bone pain and the hair loss – pointed to poison, then it was either fluorocarbon or thallium. And of the two, the most likely was thallium.

Apparently thallium is a metal which can be dissolved in water, and which has neither smell nor taste. It is an ingredient in rat poison and is relatively easy to get hold of. Thallium can be employed in a variety of ways, a large dose being sufficient to kill outright while smaller doses, administered over a period of time, would produce a death by inches. In the latter case its effects would be indistinguishable from a genuine mortal illness. For that was the other major property of thallium, that it left the body without trace in a very short period of time. There would, for example, after two years be absolutely no test they could give Osho to see whether he had been poisoned with it or not.

Osho ended this lecture as though he was going to be able to overcome the effects of the poison. Personally I feel he knew he was likely to die. Certainly he was keeping his cards pretty close to his chest. Did it really take two whole years of inexplicable ill health to suspect the US government, or some covert operations wing of it, had tried to assassinate him? With your own private doctor, and with someone as sensitive and as quick-witted as Osho? And the way he's telling the story is very unusual for him: it sounds disturbingly like a novel.

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The Last Teaching

What that lecture did was mark the beginning of the last stage of Osho's teaching.

Over a short period of time everything seemed to change.

The first thing was a real slap in the face to the whole Poona ethos. Osho said he was not going to answer any more lecture questions about relationships, or the nature of love; he had said all he had to say, and that was that. And it quickly became clear that he did not just mean love between men and women. The whole emphasis on the I-Thou, on devotion to a spiritual Master, seemed to have lost its primacy in his eyes. So did the commune – or at least all its extended family, emotional aspects. It was as though

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he was intent on ruling out the whole 'Sufi' dimension to sannyas. No more was there any talk of surrender;- on the contrary, there was a sudden insistence on individual rebelliousness. A rebelliousness which, push come to shove, had distinctly political overtones.

It is the brusqueness of this change – almost, compared with the patience of his previous work, the violence of it – which makes me feel Osho knew he was dying. He did not have the time he had thought he was going to have. Where it was all heading, however, did not become clear for several months, not until early 88, when he started a series of lectures on Zen;- a series which was to continue without a break until he was he was too ill to be able to lecture any more.

During that last year he was to produce twenty-eight books solely on Zen – speaking on Dogen and Ma Tzu, on Hyakujo and Basho and Nansen and Joshu and Rinzai and Isan and Kyozan. Finally, having talked about every Zen master anyone had ever heard of, he asked Japanese sannyasins to translate Zen material hitherto unavailable outside Japan – stories so over the top they had been dismissed as absurd, as nihilistic slapstick, and which he delighted in showing conveyed, once interpreted, the same basic message as the rest of Zen.

So what was Zen about?

Above all, Zen was about *freedom*...

Freedom from what? In the first place freedom from social, and ultimately ruling-class, conditioning.

Life of Osho

Shortly after his return to Poona, Osho had given a long series of lectures on Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*; and in one of the first of these he had drawn a parallel, which so far as I know no one had drawn before, between Nietzsche and...the Buddha. Of all Western thinkers he claimed it was Nietzsche who was the closest to Buddha. Why? Because the basic point common to both was *their attack on slave religion*. Nietzsche's furious assault on Christianity was exactly paralleled by Buddha's attack on the Vedic priesthood of his time.

"Be a light unto yourself" – Buddha's dying words sum up his long ministry; - while the epithet 'caste-breaker,' which is one of the names he was called at the time, is something of an eye-opener as to how his contemporaries understood them. That was a point Osho brought out very powerfully, the extent to which meditation – which historically Buddha had invented, and invented singlehanded – was a revolutionary force; the extent, in fact, to which Buddha was the first and most radical of all the world's revolutionaries... But exactly the same principles, or so Osho argued, underlay Nietzsche's philosophy. Had Nietzsche but thought his way to the idea of no-mind, he could have had as seminal an experience of enlightenment in terms of Western culture as had, say, Bodhidharma in terms of the Far East. His vision of the superman would have lost its hysterical edge, which was precisely what allowed it to be exploited, and been seen for what it was: a brilliantly intuitive grasp of evolution.

The *Zarathustra* lectures marked a clear break in what Osho said about Christ and Christianity.

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While in the past he had always been respectful towards Christ, one never had the feeling that, deep down, he liked him very much. Even in Poona during the 70s he had said that the entire Judaeo-Christian tradition, including Islam, fell far short of the great religions of the East. Basically because Western religion had failed to evolve the concept of enlightenment; it had remained stuck in what was essentially a devotional stance, locked theologically into the I-Thou. Spiritually, prayer was as far as it could go: the objectivity of meditation was beyond its reach. Apart from the rarest of exceptions, the Sufis had been the highwater mark of religious life in the West...But in that last year of his teaching, there was scant respect even for them. The gloves were off.

Christianity: The Deadliest Poison, And Zen: The Antidote To All Poisons one of the lecture series was called;- and it sums up the spirit of all of them.

Why is Christianity poison?

Because it says that spiritual life is essentially something transcendent to this world. "Our Father, which art in Heaven..." Never mind the patriarchal bit, it's the "art in Heaven" which is really deadly. This is asserting, right from the first, that God is transcendent to the world. God is a separate reality. God is elsewhere. God is later. Now, if this is so, then a number of things will follow, quite inevitably. You cannot find God for yourself, just as you are. You need a saviour. You need a teaching. You need a spiritual practice, to which you must apply yourself with almost superhuman diligence.

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You must deny the temptations of the world...If you have transcendence, you will have schizophrenia, everyone will be at war with themselves.

And this plays right into the hands of those who, in reality, have turned this world into a living hell...Works like *A Course In Miracles* try to rehabilitate Christianity without paying the slightest blind bit of attention to what Christianity has meant historically. Subtleties of this or that understanding of mysticism are as nothing compared to the massive repression of sexuality and every form of natural life to which Christianity brought a theological justification. To say that Christ's teaching was perverted and turned into a means of social and political repression just isn't good enough. The essence of an evolved religion, one which could truly transform the world, would be that it has an in-built capacity to forestall this kind of abuse. And, Osho said, this has only existed once: in Zen.

In all essentials Zen is the antithesis of Christianity.

Firstly because it says the divine is not transcendent to the world at all. The world is the expression of the divine. The sacred is here and now, in the present moment – in the present moment as lovers see it, as a sacrament. "God is so close," Osho said "closer than your own heartbeat." Enlightenment is instantaneous, and cannot be prepared for in any way. It has nothing to do with morality. There is no path. There is no theory. There is nothing resembling priesthood or scripture. There is nothing secular power can latch

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on to, and turn to its own ends. For Zen, the whole of spiritual life comes down to one thing: to wake up in the present moment and, while remaining fully alert, to let go.

Looking at it with the benefit of several years' hindsight, you can see what Osho was trying to do.

At the time it seemed as though he was desperately trying to make some last-minute changes to what he had been saying before – changes particularly designed to stop sannyas becoming so hierarchic again. Changes designed to cut sannyas priests and politicians down to size. To stop anything like the Ranch happening again... However what strikes me now is something much more radical than that. Osho was not just trying to backtrack and clear up contradictions in what he had said before. What he was trying to do was introduce a whole new level of understanding. Measured up against the Tantric evolutionary schema he had sketched as a young man – take it just as a metaphor, if you feel more comfortable with it like that – what he was trying to do was to lift his whole teaching up a 'chakra.' Osho was trying to raise it, largely by main force, from the fourth body to the fifth: from the psychic to the existential, from the world of visionary creativity to the world of simple being. From the Sufis to Zen. Now that he had so little time left, he was concentrating exclusively, at the expense of everything else, on communicating a glimpse of what meditation is really about: seeing who you are.

Life of Osho

Straight to the Point of Enlightenment another Zen lecture series was called, and that sums up precisely where he was trying to go.

Dying, he had lost none of his power to shock. In many ways his last teaching is his most threatening intellectually.

“The basic approach of Gautam Buddha is that you are not, and you have to look into this nothingness...” “There is no God, there is no ultimate meaning...” “Life has no purpose...Zen is rejoicing in purposelessness...”

Faced with the limp ‘New Age’ spirituality of the 80s – part and parcel of which was a thoroughly dishonest attempt to rehabilitate Christian values – Osho was to deny there is anything resembling either a soul or any other kind of self which reincarnates from life to life. Rebirth brings Christianity – and the ego – in through the back door. Even reading the printed version of these lectures today – the quotes above are from *The Zen Manifesto* – you can feel the audience wince. How, Osho queried, can there be anything like rebirth? *What* could be reborn? If you witness your own daily life, the passage of one thing to the next, you can see that there’s nothing constant from even one minute to the next. Nothing at all. You keep changing completely. So how could there be anything which lasts through death? There is no permanent entity, there is no soul – that’s what Zen is all about. The complete absence of centre.

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“Existence is just a vast sky with no end and no beginning, no boundary. There is nothing to believe and nothing to rely on. One has just to disappear. All belief is man manufactured, and all reliance, relying on a God or relying on a Christ, is out of your own fear. But there is nothing to rely on, and there is no security.

“Don’t cling with anything. Everything that you cling to is your own imagination. Your gods are your imagination, and your philosophies are your imagination. Existence has no gods, and existence has no philosophies – just a pure silence...”⁹⁰

What is there then, just nothing? What is Zen – just nihilism, of however radiant a variety? Just despair, however spiritually aristocratic?

Can anything survive death? Is it possible to be – when you are not? Or is that all complete bullshit? This, Osho says, is an existential inquiry – one which cannot be answered verbally or intellectually. What the death of the self means can only be confronted in meditation.

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The Night of the Full Moon

As the heat built up before the monsoon in 88, Osho invented two new meditations.

The first of these, *The Mystic Rose*, was on a much bigger scale than anything he had experimented with previously. Divided into three equal parts, the first part was an exploration of laughter, the second of tears, and the third of silence; and ideally you took three weeks to complete it.

For the first part, for three hours a day, for seven days, you were to make yourself laugh. You could do it any way you wanted, you just had to go on with it until it became spontaneous, and keep it up for the full three hours. For the second

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week, you were to cry;- psyching yourself into it, and keeping it up, in the same way. And for the third week, you were simply to sit still and witness. In this, its full form, *The Mystic Rose* was done as a large, on-going group at the ashram.

The second, *The No-Mind*, was a reworking of his earlier 'Gibberish' meditation. Like several Osho meditations it draws on revivalism – in this case, on the technique known as glossolalia, or 'speaking in tongues.'

The instructions for the No-Mind go:

First stage: *Gibberish or Conscious Craziness*

Standing or sitting, close your eyes and begin to say nonsense – gibberish. Make any sounds you like, but do not speak in a language, or use words that you know. Allow yourself to express whatever needs to be expressed within you. Throw everything out, go totally mad. Go consciously crazy. The mind thinks in terms of words. Gibberish helps to break up this pattern of continuous verbalization.

Sing, cry, shout, scream, mumble, talk. Let your body do whatever it wants: jump, lie down, pace, sit, kick, and so on. Do not let empty spaces happen. If you cannot find sounds to gibber with, just say la la la la, but don't remain silent.

Second Stage: *Witnessing*

After the gibberish, sit absolutely still and silent and relaxed, gathering your energy inwards, letting your thoughts drift further and further away from you, allowing yourself to fall into the deep silence and peacefulness that is at your center. You may sit on the floor or use a chair. Your head and back should be straight, your body relaxed, your eyes closed and your breathing natural.

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Be aware, be totally in the present moment. Become like a watcher on the hills, witnessing whatever passes by. Your thoughts will try to race to the future or back to the past. Just watch them from a distance – don't judge them, don't get caught up in them. Just stay in the present, watching. It is the process of watching which is the meditation, what you are watching is not important.

Third Stage: Let-Go

*After the witnessing, allow your body to fall back to the ground without any effort or control. Lying back, continue witnessing, being aware that you are not the body nor the mind, that you are something separate from both.*⁹¹

Each evening everyone at the ashram did the No-Mind in the newly completed Buddha Hall.

As the lecture drew to its close Osho would read out a clutch of jokes, which were quite as awful as ever (“Question: What is the difference between Ronald Reagan and a bucket of shit? Answer: The bucket.”) at the end of which he would signal to the drummer, Nivedano, for a loud drum-beat.

This was the sign for the gibberish to begin. Most Osho meditations look completely crazy from the outside – but the No-Mind probably looks the maddest. Buddha Hall was like a huge lunatic asylum. Hundreds of people would be sitting on the floor, ranting and raving to themselves, crooning, clutching themselves or waving their arms about, while Osho sat there watching impassively. The Lord of Misrule. When he

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judged the moment to be right he would signal for a second drum-beat; and at this everyone fell silent.

Suddenly you could hear the cicadas...and then slowly Osho would begin to speak, always starting with the same formula:

Be silent.

Close your eyes.

Feel the body to be completely frozen.

These were the first meditations he had led in person since his Bombay days, but never before had his mastery of hypnosis been so effortless...I don't know how he does it, since he seems to be talking in a perfectly normal voice, but as soon as he says *Feel the body to be completely frozen* this statue-like quality steals over me. I can't tell whether I just don't want to move any more – or whether I couldn't even if I tried.

Go inwards with your total energy,

with a great urgency

as if this is the last moment of your life.

Buddha Hall would be absolutely still. The huge sweep of the canvas roof was white as was the marble floor mirroring it. There was a mounting sense of pressure. It was like being inside a huge flying saucer.

Witness that you are not the body.

Witness that you are not the mind.

*Witness that you are only a witness, a pure witness
and nothing else.*

The baldness of it took your breath away...yet in a sense he had always been saying the same thing. This had been the

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secret point of everything all along: of being 'total,' of going consciously into sex, or love, or madness: in extremes you find yourself a conscious presence, standing apart from what is taking place. You become consciousness itself...pure consciousness, apart from, and prior to, any experience.

You are not the body.

You are not the mind.

You are only a witness, a pure witness

and nothing else

For what is the basic thing you see in meditation? The simplest, most obvious thing? Surely it is that everything changes. No second is exactly the same as the one before it. All experience is changing from one moment to the next, nothing is constant at all – or rather the only thing which is constant is the perceiving itself. The nature of that remains unchanged, whatever appears or disappears within it. That is what you are.

There's nothing you can do to attain this condition, because you are already in it. You always have been; and Osho had always said so. The very first words of the first talk he gave in English were: "There is no goal. The question of paths does not arise. All paths take you away from yourself. You are simply dreaming..."⁹²

Osho had said it all before...but said it in the midst of so many other things. You had to pick up on it for yourself: but not any longer. Now he was holding it steadily in the spotlight.

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Deeper, he would say. Deeper...

*As you are coming closer to your center,
a great silence descends over you...*

So why do I panic? What am I so frightened of? Why can't I let go? Because letting go seems the same as dying...?

Or, rather, is it simply because it's so tricky? The eye can see everything except itself – and in much the same way we cannot perceive our own perceiving. The mistake we keep on making is to think we can somehow turn around on ourselves, and see our own face. That we cannot do. We cannot observe ourselves the way we have been taught to observe the world – that is, as a separate object. We cannot see ourselves, because we are the seeing itself. We can never be an object.

Deeper... Deeper...

*One step more and you are at the very centre of
your being. This is the point where you are
absent and present both...*

Somehow he emptied you out, and held you steady in that empty space...His sheer stamina was phenomenal...It was the silences not the words which counted. The words were just to get you there. The silences held you there; sensation and inner monologue both in abeyance – being fully yourself, yet without form or shape – in this strange miraculous space you have always been in, and yet never attended to in its own right...

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“Nivedano,” Osho would call to the drummer; and a third drum-beat announced the stage of Let-Go.

Everyone sitting in Buddha Hall, and it would be packed, just keeled over. It was all elbows and knees, everyone was on top of everyone else, like puppets whose strings have been cut. The Let-Go was designed to be as total as the Freeze in the Dynamic.

*Relax... Just remain a witness and melt like ice
melting in the ocean...*

Osho's exact words changed from night to night, but they always revolved round a single basic metaphor – the image of melting, of dissolving, of individual consciousness suddenly pooling into something much vaster.

*You start melting like ice in the ocean.
Gautama the Buddha Auditorium becomes
an oceanic field of consciousness. You are no longer
separate – this is your oneness with existence.*

If we are consciousness, just consciousness itself, the ground of being – then what is my difference from you? Are we not exactly the same? Are we then in fact one being? Perhaps different cells in one being, perhaps not even that... ‘Ocean’ was very much the key image here, for it was only a few months later that he was to create the new name ‘Osho’ for himself – insisting that the name was not, as ashram spokespeople had originally said, based on the Japanese term Osho meaning teacher, but on the contrary drawn from the word ‘oceanic’ coined by William James.

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The drum was beaten for a fourth and final time, and everyone gradually returned to a sitting posture.

Now come back...

With great grace, with silence, sit down for a few moments, just to remember the golden path that you have followed...the opening into ultimate space, into nothingness, into shunyata and the great moment when you had disappeared and only existence was there.

Finally he would rise to his feet and begin to make a slow namaste, hands folded, to everyone in Buddha Hall.

He started with one side of the auditorium, and made the namaste in an extraordinarily slow sweeping movement right across to the other. At times he was moving so slowly he didn't seem to be moving at all. Personally I would say that if you wanted a taste of Osho, if you wanted to check him out and had only five minutes in which to do it, then don't bother with any of the books or tapes, don't even bother with trying a meditation. Just get one of the last Zen videos and fast-forward it right to the end. Just watch one of the last namastes. They say it all. As the smile was to Buddha, so was the namaste to Osho. I have never seen any human being treat others with such respect.

At last he would turn and do the best he could to walk, almost hobbling now, into the night.

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Dionysus the Crucified

For Osho was dying.

As the weeks drew into months he became weaker and weaker, until he had to rest all day to build up enough strength to go to Buddha Hall to speak and guide the meditation in the evening. Shunyo, in her *Diamond Days with Osho*, describes him lying in the dark, day after day, in a room with the air-conditioning turned down to freezing cold. All light was shut out by double curtains inside the windows, and by blinds outside. "My cave," Osho called it. It smelled faintly of mint.

How bad was it? How bad was the pain? Nausea, insomnia, vertigo, flashing lights when you try to focus...

Dionysus the Crucified

“Bone pain...” What does that mean? As the pain got worse, did it never stop? How bad was it for Vivek? Vivek, by now a middle-aged woman, half off her head, watching the man she’s given her life for being tortured to death, inch by inch? ‘Dionysus,’ or ‘The Crucified,’ Nietzsche had signed his last mad letters and telegrams, and Osho could well have done the same...Shunyo, who looked after him a lot at that time, says he wanted small snacks every two hours throughout the night. He never seemed to really be asleep...yet by the following evening he had again built up enough energy to go and give the lecture;- and not just to give it in some dull, self-righteous fashion, but to give it with that creative panache that marked his last months. To give it with an equally Nietzschean...gaiety.

In December 88, at the height of the Zen lectures, Osho had a series of heart attacks and nearly died.

Then, early in 89, with that strange resilience he seemed to command at the end of his life, bounced right back with some of the longest and intermittently wildest lectures he had ever given. The same themes are repeated throughout but one series of lectures in particular, *Communism and Zen Fire*, *Zen Wind*, (in many ways a response to Gorbachev’s *perestroika*, which was then at its height) strike a note unique to Osho, and at its most powerful in his last teaching. An insistence on individual enlightenment which is countered, balanced, by an equal insistence on world revolution.

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The way he conceived sannyas socially and politically swings from one extreme to another.

At times he is as energetic and politically radical as he had been in his youth. The *Zen Fire*, *Zen Wind* lectures are where he talks of the possibilities of sannyas in Russia – of sannyas in a land with a millennial God-obsession of its own, but with all the spiritual deadwood burnt away by half a century's atheism. At one point he seems to have been seriously considering moving to Russia and setting up a bigger and better version of the Ranch. There would have been none of the hostility the basic idea ran into in the States; on the contrary, there could have been a lot of support. "Lenin the Buddha," he joked; and I don't think he was just being flippant. Was there a specific point where witnessing and revolutionary action could become one? Gandhi had tried for some such thing, and the fact he had missed did not mean that it was impossible. This is the context in which Osho came up with his splendid slogan "Communism... Anarchism... Zen..." As a programme it's a fine example of one of his evolutionary series – only applied to society this time, rather than the individual. Politics One. Politics Two. Politics Three. There's a strategy for real transformation contained in this, which tomorrow's revolutionaries would do well to ponder... More particularly, it looks to me like we have the missing blueprint for the Ranch here, lost in the debacle at the Big Muddy...

At other times he seemed close to despair. The best sannyasins could hope for was to survive clandestinely – as

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an underground resistance movement, as a heresy. For some kind of Nemesis, war or plague or some still undreamt-of horror, was looming over society, and there was no longer any way to avert it. He spoke of a "Noah's Ark of consciousness," something which could contain and protect a group of people who were sincerely concerned with meditation. For the only thing which stood a chance of turning the tide on earth was a large number of enlightened individuals, working in concert. "But" he said in discourse, "your growth is so slow, there is every fear that before you become enlightened the world will be gone.

"You are not putting your total energy into meditation, into awareness. It is one of the things that you are doing, amongst many; and it is not even the first priority of your life.

"I want it to become your first priority...

"Immense responsibility rests on you because nowhere else in the whole world are people trying, even in small groups, to achieve enlightenment, to be meditative, to be loving, to be rejoicing. We are a very small island in the ocean of the world, but it does not matter. If a few people can be saved, the whole heritage of humanity, the heritage of all the mystics, of all awakened people, can be saved through you."⁹³

But there wasn't time left to explore the possibilities of sannyas as an international underground. The best medical attention money could buy, conventional or alternative, seemed unable to arrest Osho's physical deterioration. He

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started to have syncopal attacks;- that means he started to fall over. If he tried to focus lights danced in front of his eyes. He who had enjoyed reading so much never read another book after he came back to Poona. The last colour disappeared from his beard.

A further development complicated any attempt to treat his symptoms. Outside specialists to whom X-rays of Osho's jaw had been shown suggested that the rate of deterioration in his teeth and facial bones indicated not so much thallium poisoning as exposure to radiation. The scenario began to become that Osho was not poisoned, but more likely irradiated while he was in jail in Oklahoma City. In fact this would explain a number of the odd details in Osho's own account of what happened.

Max Brecher, in his 1993 book on Osho, *A Passage To America*, researched some of the basic facts about murder by radiation. The problem is that if you subject someone to a dose of radioactivity strong enough to prove lethal, then they are going to feel it. The two main ways of disguising this are either by administering the radiation in stressful or chaotic circumstances – or by keeping the subject very cold. Now this would explain the odd detail about refusing to give Osho even a single blanket on a cold November night. Also, presuming that the source of radiation was in the mattress, why he was refused a pillow. They wanted his head as close to the mattress as possible. Osho normally slept on his right side, and it was on the right side of his head and body that the

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damage was most pronounced. Further, Brecher discovered that the Oklahoma City Marshal who met the plane, signed Osho in under the false name and gave him the mattress was not part of the normal staff at the jail; and the day after Osho finally left Oklahoma City he resigned from the Marshal Service, and disappeared. Brecher, after a lot of detective work, did in fact get a lead as to where this man was, but failed, for reasons that are not made clear in his book, to follow it up.⁹⁴

That's one line of argument;- and it sounds plausible enough, though obviously there's no real proof for any of it. At the same time it is, or so I should have thought, glaringly obvious there is a quite different possibility altogether. You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to point out that the most obvious suspect in the whole affair isn't the US government at all, it is Sheela.

In her case the circumstantial evidence is enormous. Sheela was the one who had been dispensing poison, including arcane slow-acting ones, with a more liberal hand than anyone since Lucrezia Borgia. Indeed the poison she and Puja were using sounds remarkably like it was thallium all along; normally in fairly large doses; though in the case of Amrito the doctor when he was eating in the commune restaurant, in painstakingly accurate small ones. How could Sheela have tampered with Osho's food, which was prepared in his own kitchen, in his own house? There's a video from

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the last days of the Ranch, which so far as I know has never come out in book form, where Osho says that someone has just informed him that his milk was being poisoned. This isn't mentioned again – with the sole exception of Satya Bharti who, in *The Promise of Paradise*, maintains that Sheela poisoned Osho by slowly feeding thallium to a particular cow whose milk was reserved for Osho alone. Satya makes this assertion quite out of the blue; though, on reflection, it sounds so demented, so peculiarly Indian in its madness, it might conceivably be true.

Certainly Sheela had the motive. At the end she must have felt deeply humiliated and rejected by Osho, and she was a proud and passionate woman. She could well have lashed out. And if she did, Osho would have had to admit that, in the last analysis, it was nobody's fault but his own. He had pushed her too hard, and he would – or so my reading of him goes – have covered up for her. For Osho was, among so many other odd personas, a perfect gentleman... This would also explain why Sheela has kept her head down since she got out of jail. Not a word in her own defence? Not a peep – and from so incorrigible a loudmouth...?

Other scenarios just get wilder and wilder. Could Sheela have been poisoning him with thallium at the same time as the US government had him irradiated in Oklahoma? Could they have been working together in some fashion? It doesn't sound particularly plausible;- yet such is the argument of a short book published by the ashram, *Was Bhagwan Shree*

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Rajneesh Poisoned By Ronald Reagan's America? This was in fact written before Osho's death by his last secretary, so Osho must have had, to some extent at any rate, a hand in it. Perhaps he himself was not certain exactly what had happened: hence the absurdly long interval, two whole years, between his being poisoned and his announcing it publicly...None of it adds up properly; and if you root around in it you can smell a cover-up. What exactly it is I cannot say;- but whatever it is, there have to be too many people who know. Sooner or later someone will sing.

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The Death of Osho

Perhaps there are two separate cover-ups at the end of Osho's life – the first a cover-up of the circumstances surrounding his murder, the second a cover-up of the circumstances surrounding his death. For many years, for instance, he had said that freedom to kill oneself was one of the most basic human rights of all; so far as he was concerned there was no merit in dying a slow and painful death. Is there any question of Osho having killed himself? Or of his having been given a mercy shot by someone else? The story of his last days is eerily ill-documented.

The Death of Osho

Osho gave his last lecture – the final talk in *The Zen Manifesto* – in April 89, and after that he was never to speak in public again.

For the monsoon months, while the storms raged over Poona, he never left Lao Tzu House. Reading between the lines I get the idea he was doing more and more alarming quantities of nitrous oxide – having more and more ‘dental sessions’ as they called it in the ashram. For Osho had his own dental ‘surgery’ in his house: a deluxe dentist’s chair in a room walled entirely in mirror; it must have been like sitting in a jewel, with everything reflected to infinity. His tripping room. Perhaps nitrous oxide was the only thing that kept the pain at bay.

During one such session he became convinced that his death was very close; and said that henceforward he was coming to sit silently with everyone each night in Buddha Hall.

This he did, and for those last months evening *satsang* was a regular feature at the ashram. Osho would sit in his chair and have the musicians play, louder and louder, wilder and wilder, more and more discordant; then abruptly signal for the music to stop. The ensuing silence would build up and up, until it was almost solid. Then he would have the musicians start to play again, beating out the tempo with his hands and slowly working up, like some demonic conductor, towards another crescendo...repeating the whole performance two or three times, and perhaps providing a final encapsulation of his Tantra: the royal road to silence lies through noise.

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For Osho could do no more. Walking at all was becoming increasingly difficult, and by the end of the year his doctor was looking after him full time. Only rarely did he see his secretary, and then for no more than ten minutes at a time. "I used to wake him up at 6.00 p.m." says Shunyo. "He took a shower, came to Buddha Hall, and then by 7.45 p.m. he was back in bed."

Perhaps he could have hung on still longer – but just before his birthday celebration in December Vivek was found dead in a Bombay hotel room.

No public announcement about what had happened was made. Her body was brought back to Poona, and burnt on the ghats at night with only a handful of friends present. The story was that it was a drug overdose – but whether accidental, or a deliberate decision to kill herself, no one knew. In fact no one knew whether she did really die in Bombay – or whether it was in the ashram, and they just hushed it up. Whatever it was, she seems to have been in a state of great inner pain.

Of all the inadequate things in this account perhaps the worst has been my failure to do justice to Vivek. I never knew her, and there has been no way I could work her into this; but so far as I am concerned no other person, apart from Osho, played so important, or so fine, a role in the history of san-nyas...In her way she was as alone and mysterious as Osho himself. No one seems to know anything much about her. Osho's 'caretaker' they call her in the ashram books. This is

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really disgusting. She was his lover, and the only friend he ever had. She gave everything she had, and I think it tore her apart. To have been that close to enlightenment when she was with him...only to have it disappear when she was alone again. To have been surrounded by all those ashram women, all eaten up with jealousy; and then to have had to watch him die.

Horribly, her body was found just before one of the biggest of the annual celebrations at the ashram, Osho's birthday. The gleaming new marble complex was throbbing, packed with new sannyasins from Germany and Italy and Japan, probably none of whom even knew who Vivek was. The big 'celebrations' were always sannyas at its sweaty, shouting, Nuremberg Rally worst, and Osho must have had to sit there, amidst the deafening music, with all of them jumping up and down and bellowing his new name – "Osho.. !" "Osho.. !" "Osho.. !" – like he was some savage god, some idol in the jungle. Did it all replay in silence in his mind, how he had met her in Bombay that summer so long ago: she a young English girl, shy, with a long nose, and as beautiful as the day?

Osho was only to live for a few weeks more. If there was ever any doubt about the depth of whatever strange bond there was between them, the closeness with which he followed her into death should dispel it. With Vivek's death any hope of ever really knowing Osho – of knowing him humanly, with any intimacy – disappears once and for all. Vivek was the only person you could say was close to him. She was the only

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one who got to throw things at him. Which he richly deserved. Living with him must have been intolerable... One time at darshan I remember him saying, "I might be wrong." *Wrang*. "I might be *wrang*." He sounded genuinely intrigued by the possibility...

Those last days a note of madness and horror creeps in – the dark chord of a Jacobean tragedy.

Osho continued to come to Buddha Hall, but about a week after Vivek's death was reported to say that someone in the audience was repeating a mantra during the meditation.

The mantra was hostile and was designed, while he was open during the meditation, to do him harm. Osho was specific as to where in the auditorium the sound was coming from, and everyone in the front rows (for Osho said the sound was coming from somewhere close to him) was, from one satsang to the next, moved this way and that in an attempt to pinpoint its location. Buddha Hall was combed for any device employing ultra-sonics. Night after night this went on, with Osho continuing to maintain that he was being attacked by black magic, and that this was being done by the same group of people who had destroyed the commune in the US.

Was this for real? Or was it some kind of parting 'device'? Or was he just going mad? Just as his body was disintegrating so was that magnificent intelligence? Or, on the contrary, was he quite right and there was someone or some-

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thing very close to him which was designed to kill him? A high-tech esoteric assassin? Or is that completely potty?

Like so much about his death, the situation never became clear. His condition continued to deteriorate, and faster and faster. He died on the 19th of January 1990, of heart failure, nearly six weeks after Vivek. He was 58 years old.

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“Osho” writes Shunyo “said to me on more than one occasion that going to America had destroyed His work.”⁹⁵ Shunyo, of course, proceeded to deny it; she told him how great an effect he was having, and on people all over the world. He listened to her in silence...while of course he was perfectly right. Sannyas buried its heart on the Big Muddy. What happened there meant that many of the most adventurous souls in sannyas, the real pioneers, those on whom almost all the basic work had already been done, were thrown into a crisis of doubt from which many were never to recover; it meant that everything Osho said and did back in India was dismissed without being ever being listened to at all.

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Perhaps, had Osho lived, he could have turned the tide in the West – but to do so would have taken more time than was left him. Osho's whole approach to growth was based upon people learning through their own mistakes. Whatever glimpses of deep meditation he had given people at the end, they still had to find their own way, through seeing the failure of everything they tried to do in normal society, to understanding that only the awakening of the force Osho called meditation was going to make any real difference. But at the time of his death this process was still very far from complete. Simply his disciples were not ready.

That's in terms of individual sannyasins;- but the same thing applies to his work in relation to society as a whole. Culturally, sannyas is still hanging fire.

Osho's work strikes me as being the most radical attempt to create a new way of life which came out of the 60s and 70s. But it only emerged fully towards the end of that period, at a point when the wave of revolt it expressed was largely defeated and already ebbing back. Culturally, sannyas was left beached. Since about 1980 there has been a period of extreme reaction in every sphere of life: we have had twenty years of a bankrupt society without even a peep of opposition; and not until the ending of this period will sannyas really be activated, or not on the scale to which it could be.

The role it plays at this point may be something very different from the one it played in the 60s and 70s. This totalitarian, breathtakingly ugly society can no longer be opposed

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in terms of a purely political opposition: it can only be contested in terms of an entirely different set of values. You cannot have a radical opposition to this society without an alternative account of *what people really want to do*; you cannot, in the last analysis, have a new revolutionary politics without an alternative theory of evolution. From this point of view, sannyas could be dynamite.

During the years immediately after Osho's death the Poona ashram boomed.

The last fortune Osho made was spent empire-building in Koregaon Park. A group of black marble pyramids – big things, the size of houses, air-conditioned and designed to be used as group rooms – were constructed just across the road from the original ashram buildings. A large swimming pool – black marble again – was built. The old *nullah* – the area of waste land which used to lie slap in the middle of Koregaon Park – was landscaped, at what must have been enormous cost, into twelve acres of lush, semi-tropical garden; and set amidst this is the final transformation of the old Koregaon Park ashram...into a New Age university.

An array of techniques of ecstasy – devotional, yogic or shamanic – have, as Osho wished, been gathered together in one place; and the ensemble structured along the lines of a university campus. There are individual sessions and groups and trainings in every aspect of meditation...and the formula has proved a winner. Every winter Koregaon Park is packed

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with far more people than were ever there when Osho was alive. In fact in terms of pure numbers, the ashram must be close to becoming the main tourist attraction in India. But what's really going on there? Is this Osho's vision of a contemporary religious university, somewhere to rival the Nalanda or Khajuraho of India's past – or is it, in fact, a blatant sell-out?

Oddly enough, it's really difficult to tell.

On the one hand, without the Poona ashram it's difficult to think that sannyas as a movement would have survived at all. Not only has the ashram continued to pump out the books and tapes and videos, the groups and trainings, it has functioned as a central meeting place for sannyasins from all over the world. The sheer numbers of sannyasins and the variety of countries they are coming from is something you can only grasp in Poona. There are sannyasins from South America, and from Russia, and from all over the Far East – not just from Japan and Korea, but also from Taiwan and mainland China. Osho's books have topped the bestseller lists in Korea – his books on the Sufis, interestingly enough – and the time may come when Osho suddenly looks something very different from the essentially 'Western' guru which is the only way he has been seen to date.

What's more, there's a whole new generation of sannyasins. As he lay dying Osho had thrown his nets far wider than ever before. In an interview his last secretary stated "Osho said that he wanted the commune to be multi-dimen-

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sional, much more so than in Poona One where the focus was mainly on therapy. He said, 'Have everything here – whatever people want, have it here.'"⁶ A lot of people who were just on holiday in India and went to Poona to check it out as though it were Goa or Kathmandu ended up staying there, and taking sannyas. And, even more surprisingly, there's no denying the fact that the ashram still works. It still does the same old thing. It sets you apart, and then it begins to mirror you. Somehow it highlights, even caricatures, your reactions. It makes you witness...

...Well, that's the positive side of it. But as you wander round Multiversity Plaza, with its pyramids and peacocks and electric waterfalls, there's no mistaking the whiff of something rotten in the air. This is the successful cult; this is the streamlined religious corporation...The set-up is basically fascistic...On Osho's death the control of the ashram fell into the hands of a triumvirate composed of Osho's doctor – the much-poisoned Amrito – a Canadian multi-millionaire, Jayesh, who keeps an exceedingly low profile, and Osho's last secretary, Anando, an Englishwoman who had trained to be a lawyer. What they decide is supposedly the expression of a council of 21 sannyasins, though one suspects this council functions as little more than a rubber stamp. These three steered the ashram through its most critical period: the months immediately after Osho's death, when it was wide open to the possibility of the Indian government moving in

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and simply throwing everyone out of the country. For this they deserve everyone's gratitude;- but at the same time they have done it at the cost of taking all the rebelliousness, all the real edge out of sannyas. Push come to shove, they are a bunch of Yuppies. The thing about Club Med was a joke at first, but it seems to be getting very near the literal truth. Club Med gone introvert.

Earlier I suggested that the people who were most attracted to running sannyas as an organisation were, sub-consciously, the very people who felt most threatened by it...Certainly the people who lived in the ashram were always such *goody-goodies*. All along their only real interest seemed to lie in making Osho respectable;- and there's no more ghastly misservice you can do a Tantra master. What Osho, or any other Tantrika is doing, is calling attention to everything which is repressed in any given situation; and saying that it is in fact this repressed element which is the dynamic one. "It is better to be crucified than to be respectable," he is reported to have said during the last months of his life; and this wasn't just bravado. To start to whitewash over the things about Osho you find threatening, the way the ashram does, is to take away the whole cutting edge from his work. Look at what happened to poor Krishnamurti. There he is, stuck in his row of religious paperbacks – he's respectable all right, and for all the effect he's having, he might as well have never lived. Penguin books are the kiss of death.

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What's the value of the ashram, then? Is it something Osho just stuck on automatic as he died, so it could continue to broadcast sannyas in the world for as long as it held together? So that it gave individuals some chance of working on themselves, if only for a brief period of time? Or is there something else of greater significance here?

Is the ashram, or the multiversity or whatever, a tentative model of something? Of something which could be developed – certainly on a more democratic basis: a *commune*, *geddit?* – all over the world? I mean, look, the basic problem of sannyas, of real flesh and blood sannyasins living in the world today, isn't meditation, it isn't even therapy, it's simply keeping their heads above water. First and foremost it's a problem of getting enough money to survive without being totally dehumanised by the nature of wage-labour in an utterly alienated society: of getting home in the evening without being totally wiped out; of still having enough energy to be able to explore these ideas, to explore them creatively.

Basically the 'chakra' which has to be developed is the first one, the physical body, its need for food and health and housing. Its need for leisure. "Money, food and sex" said Da Free John. That's where you start. But where in sannyas has there been the slightest concern with this? Look at ordinary sannyas economy in the West. House-cleaning, peepshows, cowboy psychiatry... it's not exactly brilliant, is it?

Does the concept of the ashram contain the germ of a half-way sane economy? "Whatever people want, have it

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here.” What would that mean in practice? At the height of sannyas in Germany, for instance, during the mid 80s, there were a number of public dance-halls run by sannyasins, which were a runaway popular success. In a more general sense, you can see that mass tourism has completely banalised the planet. Everywhere’s pretty much the same as everywhere else – or if it isn’t yet, it soon will be. This means that holidays are no longer going to be geography-based: holidays are going to become psychological.

The Poona ashram is a precocious model of a future leisure industry. As such it could go two ways. Either towards a new market for State capitalism, which is the way it looks like it’s going;- or alternatively, could it be cloned by sannyasins in cities all over the world as, inseparably, a way of making a living and a way of subversion? As something wild, something more like 70s Poona – only with a warier eye towards élitism? A Mystery School stuck in the social main-line, like an intravenous drip system: feeding right into the heart of the leisure industry?

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Veeresh, and Poonja

Just before his death, Osho invited the US therapist Veeresh into Lao Tzu House to have a formal portrait photograph taken with him. Osho had never done any such thing before. In Zen, I believe they call this the Master 'taking you on the mat,' i.e. inviting you to sit down with them, and it is a signal sign of recognition.

Of all the 70s star group-leaders Veeresh was the only one who remained loyal after the destruction of the Ranch. Perhaps because he was the only one who had continued to live a life in the world, first in London, then in Holland, and never holed up in the ashram the way the rest of them did.

A New York junkie who finally kicked through the kind of abrasive encounter-type therapy for addicts being explored

in the States in the early 70s, Veeresh came over to London to pioneer the same sort of approach there. He was in Poona in the early days, then went to Holland where he initiated a drug rehabilitation programme which became linked with the most dynamic sannyas centre in Europe. His work was always very much the basic inhibition-busting type of early sannyas therapy. Interviewed recently he said:

“I am willing to use any means to force people to love each other.

“I learned from Osho a long time ago when I was working for him in Poona, that people change in three different ways. If you are sleepy all your life, and you have a car accident, you suddenly wake up. That’s called SHOCK. When people come here, they bring years of behaviour patterns I’m supposed to change, years of conditioning that I want them to look at in a different way. One of the ways of doing that is shock.

“The other way for change to happen is LOVE. That’s what Osho taught me. If you love somebody, even the greatest idiot in the world, at some point they have to stop playing games with you. You give them the opportunity to lift themselves up. Because of your love, they come in contact with their own love. Love creates change.

“The third one is AWARENESS. You’ve been coming to groups for years and suddenly you discover, ‘I’ve been doing this all my life. The door is over here and I choose to go into the wall. I want a relationship and what do I do? I suck my thumb in a bar. I never do exactly what I want to do.’ Then

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suddenly one day you say: 'Hey! I'm stupid, I've been making the same mistake over and over, and I don't want to do that any more. I want to change it.' That's called awareness."⁹⁷

Shock, love, awareness... This is straight out of a Poona group in the 70s. Same goal: to jumpstart people's vitality, their self-respect; and pretty much by any means possible. There are the usual tales of sex and violence in Veeresh's groups. Certainly he draws heavily on bio-energetics: on physical contact, on emotional release, on the sense of being part of a group; on very little sleep, and on a non-stop partying which is, by all accounts, frequently a gruelling business.

A member of the original Dutch commune says:

"The way we do it is rather like looking inside while we are running. We create a certain dynamic which moves you towards other people while you are looking at yourself... What's going on here is that meditation is happening in action. You are doing so much, that at the end you just flow. Your mind cannot keep up with it any more, and that's the space where meditation can happen."⁹⁸

At the opposite pole to this – the sex-and-drugs-and-rock'n'roll end of sannyas – was the other great influence on the movement during the early and mid 90s. This was the Indian guru H. W. Poonja.

Poonja was already 80 years old when Osho died in 1990. A disciple of Ramana Maharshi, Poonja had been teaching sporadically for years but not until he met sannyasins –

sannyasins fresh from Osho's last guided *No-Mind* meditations – did he find the audience he had been looking for.

For Poonja taught the same thing. You are not the body, you are not the mind, you are just the witness. You are neither the knower nor the known, you are the knowing. You are consciousness itself. There is nothing you have to do to attain this because it is already, and always has been, the case. You just have to let go.

“When you know it,” he said, “you will laugh! People go to mountain caves for 30 years just to find Being itself. Being is just here and now. It is like searching for your glasses while wearing them. What you have been searching for is nearer than your own breath. You are always in the Source. Whatever you are doing, you are doing it in the Source.”⁹⁹

Poonja's whole effort was to throw you back, you personally, to your own Source – and for the few seconds or minutes he could do it, to hold you there. That's what his morning *satsangs* in Lucknow were for. He was uniquely available. Anyone could go up there and sit down with him...

All you had to do was hand in a letter or note before *satsang* began, and when Poonja came in he was presented with the whole pile. Sitting down under a poster-size photo of Ramana, freshly garlanded with marigolds each day, resettling his specs on his nose, he would open the first letter and start to read it aloud. He made a lot of play with this opening and reading of letters, they were his one prop. Then he would have the writer come up and sit down in front of him.

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The bare bones were pure Ramana.

“The question is this: ‘Who Am I?’ Keep alert and then you will know. Pay full attention and then wait for the answer. Keep quiet and wait for the answer. It only takes one instant of time. Question where the ‘I’ is arising from now. Previous notions and concepts will not help you. This is the question you have not yet asked yourself. You ask questions to others about something else, but not this question to your own self.”¹⁰⁰

In practice what Poonja would do was start to play with your letter. Pretending to misread something, he would suddenly zero in on what you meant by a key word. He could be hilariously funny. If Osho peeled you away from your body through a sort of hypnotic trance, Poonja sidestepped it by...something close to stand-up comedy. He would trip you up with glances, with abrupt pauses, with body language – with confusion, with some brilliant comic timing – rapidly snipping away at everything you’d ever taken yourself to be. Very quickly there seemed to be little left. You could see the expression of amazement, of sudden recognition of something which in reality they had always known – yes, of bliss, that’s not too strong a word – cross the face of the person in front of him at the moment they truly let go.

“There is no depth,” he would announce happily. “It is immaculate emptiness. No inside, no outside, no surface, no depth. No place to go. Everywhere you go is here. Just look around and tell me the limits of this moment. Go as far as you can go. How is it measured? Its length? Breadth? Width? This moment has nothing to do with time or depth.”¹⁰¹

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A New Spiritual Tradition

This wealth of satori was both Poonja's strength and his weakness. Osho, by comparison, always tended to downplay the importance of satori in a person's development: for all his larger-than-life quality he was against hothouse atmospheres. Osho was aiming for Zorba the Buddha, for the complete and integrated human being – not just for catapulting people into states which, however superb, were bound sooner or later to fade back into the light of common day.

Veeresh and Poonja... In a way you could say they represented the two poles of sannyas in the years immediately after Osho's death. And not only represented what was best

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about it, they also expressed its crucial weakness: its tendency to fragment, to split into mutually suspicious sub-groups. On the one hand, Veeresh saying get into your body and your feelings; on the other, Poonja saying, get out of them...Veeresh is like the first half of an Osho meditation, without the second; Poonja is like the second half of an Osho meditation, without the first. Veeresh is Zorba – and Poonja the Buddha. Both are right – and yet neither can accept the equal rightness of the other. Neither has Osho's grasp of evolution, of dialectics;- and both are the poorer for it. Veeresh sounds to me like he's on shaky ground when he talks about meditation; and if you watch Poonja videos closely you can see that he's far from comfortable with women. Backed into a corner, both are off balance. Veeresh with his Ecstasy, and Poonja with his cricket – frankly, which is worse?...Well, speaking as a sanniyasin, the cricket I guess.

Looked at from this angle you can see what the great achievement of Osho was: that single-handed he brought so many aspects of rebellion, political, psychological, artistic and spiritual, all of which had previously been seen as mutually exclusive, into accord with one another. What Osho did was bring about an enormous synthesis.

The Sixties revolution, the 'revolution of youth' which failed so ignominiously, defined itself as Marx...plus Freud. To this Osho added a whole other dimension...the Buddha. Total revolution equals Marx, plus Freud, plus the Buddha.

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This allowed Osho to bring together, and to interrelate an enormous variety of outlawed experience. And not just the Eastern mystical traditions, the Sufis, the Taoists, the Tantrikas, exegesis of which was his forte;- it also allowed him to incorporate, at least in principle, the whole of Western counter-culture, from the first Romantics to the Surrealists and the Hippies...

What Osho did, which is of such enormous importance, was to play the part of a catalyst. What he did was to bring so many scattered people's insights and experiments into one focus; what he did was to remove the sectarian, slightly fanatical edge from their individual breakthroughs, and make them workable. With Osho a whole prophetic tradition suddenly attains critical mass. Suddenly it has become real. Suddenly it has become an established fact; and one which could affect a whole civilisation. What Osho did was to lay the foundations for *a new spiritual tradition*.

This he tried to focus in the creation of the first lay religious order in the West since...since when? Since the end of the Middle Ages? Since the Franciscans and the Dominicans? You have only to put sannyas in this august, and frankly awful, company to see how iconoclastic it was. Freethinking, erotic, playful, 'sincere but not serious,' this was an attempt to create a freewheeling, explicitly post-Freudian religious order: an attempt to forge, *as a real social force*, the central mystical and revolutionary heresy of the early twenty-first century.

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Having said that I can only add: in my understanding sannyas is not about worshipping Osho. Sannyas is not about worshipping a dead guru. For all the wonder one may feel at this extraordinary being – and nowhere in this have I even approached the question of who or what Osho may have been – the point lies in what he was trying to create. The important thing, as he so often said, isn't the finger that is pointing, but the moon it is pointing at;- and the moon Osho was pointing at was the creation of sannyas...And just as sannyas is not about worshipping a dead guru it is not about worshipping any particular set of ideas or experiments as though they were fixed eternal verities. Within the synthesis Osho was trying to bring about he was juggling with an enormous range of experience – of politics, of therapy, of meditation, of creativity, of mysticism – and the role played by these specific elements can only remain flexible and pragmatic. The sannyas he was trying to create was capable of evolving, of changing, of taking new insights and experience on board. Sannyas is nothing if not experimental...Perhaps, from this point of view, part of Poonja's significance in the history of sannyas will be that he illustrated, for the first time, that the movement was capable of absorbing another highly idiosyncratic living Master, and a very powerful one in his own right, *without ceasing to be sannyas...*

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The Colour of Magic

Psychotherapy, meditation, creativity, mysticism...it's a huge synthesis. And a synthesis existing not just as theory but as a quasi-political, international movement, with people at very different stages of their own individual development. What can hold it all together?

I spent ages trying to think my way through this, while all along the answer was under my nose.

Really, it couldn't have been more obvious. For what was the bottom line of sannyas? What happened when you 'took sannyas' in the old days? The basic thing? The most obvious thing? *You wore orange*...You adopted the centuries-old colour of the spiritual misfit in India. You dressed like a *sadhu*. In fact that was all there was to taking sannyas, that

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and the mala: the rest was optional, the lecture, the meditations, the groups. At darshan I remember Osho telling people, O.K., go down to Goa;- hang out on the beach, get stoned if you must, nothing wrong with it...nothing *wrang* with it, rolling his eyes horribly...*just wear the orange*.

In fact the orange was the *only* thing about which Osho put his foot down.

Dharm Jyoti illustrates the point vividly in her memoir of Osho in his Bombay days. At the time Osho first introduced the idea of wearing orange she and several of her friends did everything they could to avoid doing any such thing. Having put off getting an orange dress from one day to the next, finally she went round to see Osho in his flat. He was sitting in his room, waiting for her with a large bolt of orange cloth he had just bought in the bazaar. Producing a pair of tailor's scissors, he invited her to cut the cloth for her robe there and then.¹⁰² You can't get much more hands-on than that.

Not that Dharm Jyoti was alone in her resistance to the idea. In fact it was precisely the orange, that and the mala, which most got up people's noses about sannyas. Wearing orange seemed the very hallmark of a *cult*: as though people were almost gratuitously flaunting their servility: their desperate need to belong.

Perhaps at the time a lot of people who took sannyas in the West weren't aware of the associations of that particular colour in India. In Indian society, orange clothes signalled,

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and signalled without the slightest ambiguity, one thing and one thing alone: *drop-out*.

Culturally this went back thousands of years. Traditional Hindu society had assigned orange to the criminal outcaste; and even in the late twentieth century orange robes – orange rags and tatters more like – were still the hallmark of the *sadhu*; and it was the life-style of the *sadhus*, rather than any particular aspect of Buddhism or Hinduism which was the original Hippie turn-on to Eastern spirituality. It was the *sadhus* who brought a whole new dimension to the idea of ‘dropping out’ and being ‘on the road;’ they showed that at least one version of the alternative society could work. And there were extraordinary numbers of them: even when I was first in India figures of fifteen to twenty million throughout the sub-continent were still being bandied about.

Sadhus were a sort of anarchists’ union. All varieties of God-obsession – fakirs, bhaktis, *gnani* yogis – jostled with downright rogues, potheads and madmen. Some were genuine saints and visionaries, others sort of Boy Scouts *noir*. Some were based in a particular ashram, others seemed to be permanently on the road, either wandering along the old pilgrimage trails in the Himalayas, sleeping under the stars, or hitching incredible distances across the plains to temples deep in the South. In its way, it was a life of pure celebration. No one owned anything, just a pot or a blanket maybe, but they lived and meditated, without needing to work, in some of the most dramatically beautiful country in the world...

Life of Osho

Admittedly, the first thing wearing orange in the West brought about was a sense of group cohesion. But what's wrong with that? At this point, anyone can see the central psychological feature of this society is that it is *isolating* everyone – isolating each one of us, and robbing us of our power – and it was just this process that wearing orange threw into reverse. Like-minded people began to stand up in public and be prepared to be counted: suddenly you were meeting more people than you'd ever met in your life, and a whole social underground was yours for the asking. Orange provided that most basic function of culture, it brought people together.

But that was only half the story. Because at the same time as it brought people together it also set you apart. Let's face it, the basic thing wearing orange did was...make you look a complete dickhead. Orange put you on the spot. Suddenly you had to stand up for yourself. Suddenly you had to walk your talk. "A sense of humour" Osho observed "should be the foundation stone of the future religiousness of man." Well, the first time you wore your orange to the supermarket you found out exactly what that meant. The mayhem wearing orange caused overturned any Us/Them applecart. Far from being the most cultic thing about sannyas, it was the least cultic thing of all. What wearing orange was, was probably the most powerful, and certainly the funniest of all the meditation techniques Osho invented: *it brought inside and outside together.*

The Colour of Magic

For the major part of his career, Osho was to insist that the energy generated by this played an irreplaceable role in sannyas. Only with the collapse of the Ranch did he give up on it;- and, in retrospect, you can see that it was from this point onwards that all the real fight was knocked out of sannyas. It lost its edge when it lost its street presence. It lost its cheek. It lost its balls. In fact it started, from precisely this point, to become a cult...secretive, hierarchic, and basically conformist.

There's no need to be hung up about the colour orange per se, as though it were some dogma. Though I must admit I'm tempted...this could still prove the kicking-off point for a new and particularly virulent sannyas fundamentalism: the Dynamic, orange, free love...But I'd best back off, and do no more than stress the richness, the multiplicity of the functions the colour played. Perhaps there's something else which could do the same thing today;- though personally I'd be at a loss to suggest what it could be... Other emerging cultures have had the guts to stand up and be counted in some such manner – Hippies did it with Levis, Rastas with dreadlocks – but the orange has something both more archaic and more...more child-like, more playful about it than that. That's what the sadhus say about their bleached-out orange and apricot rags: that they are the colours of the first rays of the rising sun. That there's a new day coming;- and these are its colours.

NOTES

All titles by Osho unless otherwise stated

- 1 *The Silent Explosion* pp.21-22
- 2 *The Silent Explosion* p.22
- 3 *The Silent Explosion* p.23 one passage transposed
- 4 *The Three Treasures* vol. 3 pp.5-6
- 5 *The Three Treasures* vol. 3 p.31
- 6 *The Book* vol. 1 pp.297-298
- 7 *The Book* vol. 1 p.119
- 8 *The Book* vol. 1 p.452
- 9 *The Orange Book* pp.134-135
- 10 *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* pp.95-96
- 11 *Hammer On The Rock* p.243
- 12 *Life, Love, Laughter* pp.61-63 abridged
- 13 *The Book* vol. 3 pp.372-373
- 14 *Hammer On The Rock* p.201
- 15 *Hammer On The Rock* p.8
- 16 JONES, Franklin (Da Free John) *The Knee of Listening* pp.269-270
- 17 *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* p.13
- 18 *The Book* vol. 2 p.113
- 19 *From Sex To Superconsciousness* p.22
- 20 *From Sex To Superconsciousness* pp.56-57
- 21 *Tantra, Spirituality and Sex* p.91
- 22 *From Sex To Superconsciousness* p.13
- 23 *Life, Love, Laughter* p.53
- 24 *Life, Love, Laughter* p.75
- 25 *Sufis: People Of The Path* discourse 24 my transcription
- 26 *Life, Love, Laughter* p.87 one sentence transposed
- 27 *Sufis: People Of The Path* discourse 24 my transcription
- 28 *The Book* vol. 3 p.513
- 29 *Zen: The Path Of Paradox* discourse 4 my transcription
- 30 *Zen: The Path Of Paradox* discourse 4 my transcription
- 31 *Tantra, Spirituality and Sex* pp.5-6
- 32 RAWSON, Philip, *The Art Of Tantra* pp.98-99 slightly abridged
- 33 FITZGERALD, Frances, *Cities On A Hill* pp.292-293

- 34 *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* p.193
- 35 *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* p.186
- 36 *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* p.59
- 37 *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* p.14
- 38 *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* p.17
- 39 *Tantra – The Supreme Understanding* p.18
- 40 *Dimensions Beyond The Known* p.148
- 41 *Dimensions Beyond The Known* p.150
- 42 v. GORDON, James, *The Golden Guru* p.24
- 43 *Dimensions Beyond The Known* p.151
- 44 *The Book* vol. 1 p.457
- 45 *The Book* vol. 1 p.458
- 46 *Dimensions Beyond The Known* p.151
- 47 *The Book* vol. 3 p.517
- 48 *Dimensions Beyond The Known* pp.166-167
- 49 *Dimensions Beyond The Known* pp.169-170
- 50 JYOTI, Ma Dharm, *One Hundred Tales For Ten Thousand Buddhas* p.28
- 51 *The Golden Future* p.204
- 52 *The Golden Future* p.202
- 53 *The Golden Future* p.205
- 54 *The Book* vol. 1 p.146
- 55 *Sufis: People Of The Path* vol. 2 p.320
- 56 *The Goose Is Out* pp.282-283
- 57 *The Goose Is Out* pp.284-285
- 58 *The Goose Is Out* p.286
- 59 MILNE, Hugh, *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* p.208
- 60 MILNE, Hugh, *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* p.219
- 61 MILNE, Hugh, *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* p.241
- 62 MILNE, Hugh, *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* p.248
- 63 MILNE, Hugh, *Bhagwan: The God That Failed* pp.230-232 abridged
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- 69 *In Search of the Miraculous* vol. 1 p.108

- 70 *In Search of the Miraculous* vol. 1 pp.69-70
- 71 *In Search of the Miraculous* vol. 1 pp.150-151
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- 76 *In Search of the Miraculous* vol. 2 p.70
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- 81 GROF, Stanislav, *Realms of the Human Unconscious* p.237
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- 83 *In Search of the Miraculous* vol. 2 p.112
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- 101 POONJA, H.W. *Papaji* p.12
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