



Een pad naar Zelf

Pierre Evald

Ten tijde van Gandhi's zoutmars en zijn opstand tegen het Britse Rijk vond in MadhyaPradesh in Centraal India de geboorte plaats van een jongetje dat zijn zichtbare sporen zou nalaten op het vlechtwerk van Indiase spiritualiteit. Naderhand zou zijn naam Osho worden (1931-1990). Zijn familie liet hem in zijn jeugd kennismaken met tantra, jainisme, advaita vedanta en Indiase mystici. Aldus werd het scala aan spirituele paden ingeluid, dat hij later bij zijn lezingen gedurende meer dan dertig jaar in Jabalpur, Bombay, Poona en Oregon in de Verenigde Staten zou overdragen aan zijn volgers.

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Osho – a Path to Oneself

At the time of Gandhi's Salt March and his rising up against the British Empire, it happened that a babyboy was born in rural Madhya Pradesh, central India, a boy who was to leave his visible mark on the spiritual tapestry of India. His name was later to become Osho (1931-1990). In his childhood his family introduced him to Tantra, Jainism, Advaita Vedanta and Indian mystics, heralding the range of spiritual paths he would later transmit to his followers in discourses for more than thirty years in Jabalpur, Bombay, Poona and in Oregon, USA.

Indian *sadhus* also broadened the young Rajneesh's understanding of the Vedanta teachings. Deriving from the Upanishads they constituted an essential core of not only Hinduism but also of Jainism, the religion of his family home. Advaita Vedanta (*advaita*: not two) is a sub-line of Vedanta introduced by the mystic *Adi Shankara* more than one thousand years ago. Osho and Ramana Maharshi both had these teachings as their core spiritual values. That all apparent separation is created only by the mind and your only task is to enhance your ability to distinguish between the eternal and the transitory, or between the absolute reality and the relative reality. Meditation is *the* device to show you who you already are from your very birth: You are it - *Tat tvam asi*. This may sound quite familiar as an under flowing current in most of Osho's teachings with its emphasis on using your energy on the real and true self and realizing that you are not separate from the world, instead of wasting it on false and trivial matters.

Leaving his home town Osho went to Jabalpur for his academic study of philosophy, and the almost 20 years he spent there as a student and later professor we cannot too much underline as his formative years where events and experiments were to make an everlasting impact on his future work. He started talking to small gatherings in his home, won awards for official debate contests and participated as a speaker in religious conferences. And now the first small pamphlets as well as manuscripts and letters from his hand came to light.

He started travelling All India by train to reach out and by 1970 he settled in the metropolis of Bombay. There he began to initiate his followers into what he called 'Neo-Sannyas', a term that shocked the conservative society around him. Now Westerners started to show up in large numbers, among them several figures from the humanistic growth movement and the London centre *Quaesitor*. Up to now Indians had been his listeners and Hindi the language he was using, but with the change in his audience new ways were needed to spread the message. The first of his many books now appeared in English, *I Am the Gate* (1972).

Osho made his move from Bombay to Poona on March 21, 1974, a date which coincided with the 21st anniversary of his enlightenment. The ashram he founded in the lush greenery of suburban Koregaon Park was to expand during the 1970s into a spiritual growth centre for Westerners as well as Indians. They arrived in their thousands to have a look at it all and some chose to stay with their master 'forever'.

In the mornings in Buddha Hall he spoke alternate months in Hindi and English introducing his listeners to most Eastern religious paths and Western philosophy in a way which hadn't happened before anywhere on this planet. True. And in the evenings in Chuang Tzu Auditorium, sannyasins and visitors in darshan with their master could experience *shaktipath* and spaces of consciousness beyond the transmission of words. As if this wasn't enough, in the daytime a variety of active meditations were offered – among them the cathartic Dynamic Meditation, earlier on practiced in the mornings on Juhu Beach in Bombay. Not to mention the whole array of therapy groups led by therapists in the forefront of the humanistic psychology movement. They had chosen to use their skills in an atmosphere where their cleansing work became an essential prerequisite to the participants' spiritual growth.

For example, let's have a look at the process of *Enlightenment Intensive* with its question *Who Am I?* - the koan Ramana Maharshi used to give to his disciples. It was created by the American psychotherapist Charles Berner in 1968 who designed the process which grew out of ancient Indian spiritual traditions, Carl Rodger's method of co-counseling and the discipline of working on a koan in the Zen tradition facing the wall in silence.

Imagine yourself sitting with 60 others on the flat roof of Krishna House in the ashram, protected against the sun by scaffold poles with cloth. Cushions are lined up and mattresses stowed away as we have to spend three days and nights here. All are sitting in dyads facing each other. Your partner asks you: Tell me who you are. And you start babbling, where you're born, family, living, job and what not for five minutes. A gongong is heard and a message comes: Change over. Now you ask your partner the same question, and he/she too goes on babbling, born, family, living, job and so forth. Then the gongong is heard twice and the message comes: Change partners. So you move to the right, now facing a new partner and the story goes on. With the same question in a new dyad, maybe triggering new answers from you to the very same question. This goes on for 18 hours a day. Interrupted only for food breaks and when 20 of you are going to the washroom in the basement twice a day with its six showers, six washbasins and six toilets without doors. For 20 minutes you're supposed to get it all done, whatever you have to get done. And then back to your question-answer structure. After a certain amount of time these days you may find yourself floating in light, placing a purple aura on your partner or experiencing that the question and all answers are gently evaporating into thin air. Or you may run away screaming. Drop-out rate? Considerable. 'The one you're looking for is you', as one of Osho's one liners says.

He left Poona in mid-1981, allegedly for medical treatment in the US, and soon a vast ranch area was bought in the dry desert of Oregon where in compliance with the American Utopian tradition an ecological farming and spiritual experiment were to flourish for five years. Osho said in Oregon:

"Now the greatest challenge is how to maintain the balance of nature, how to maintain ecological harmony. It was never there before, it is a new problem.

The modern mind has been too aggressive against nature, and it has created the ecological crisis. Our whole approach is wrong, it is destructive. We only take from the earth, and we never give anything back. We only exploit nature; we only go on taking, and all the resources are being spent.... But things have now gone to the extreme. Either man has to drop his aggressive attitude or man has to get ready to say goodbye to this planet." (1982).

It is no wonder with his fleet of Rolls-Royces Osho definitely succeeded in speaking the easily understood language of American materialism and greed, but they also made him an easy target for vested religio-political interests. We dare say they got the message, as he was arrested at gunpoint without a warrant and taken to five jails in twelve days, where he most likely was exposed to fatal substances, and finally had to leave USA with a minor sentence of sham marriages among his followers.

And now began an Odyssey which left him *persona non grata* in the airports of Geneva in Switzerland, Arlanda (Stockholm), and Heathrow (London). A US navy aircraft was following him with officials carrying dossiers to be presented to any foreign authority who might consider letting him into their country. The final score of his World Tour reached 21 democracies who had either deported him or denied him entry and passed him on to some other country where he might try his luck once more. Anyway, he was able to deliver live discourses in Kathmandu, Nepal, in Agios Nikolaos on Crete and in Punta del Este, Uruguay, where he completed a series of talks on esoteric matters which he hadn't touched since early days in Bombay, and he introduced the *Mystery School* to his sannyasins.

Osho talking in Bombay on his ten non-commandments:

"And you want to know if somebody asks you about my philosophical standpoint... It is not going to be that easy, because I see man as a multi-dimensional being. You will be able to state it standing on one foot, there is no need for sentences, but you will have to state ten non-commandments.

The first: freedom.

The second: uniqueness of individuality.

The third: love.

The fourth: meditation.

The fifth: non-seriousness.

The sixth: playfulness.

The seventh: creativity.

The eighth: sensitivity.

The ninth: gratefulness.

Tenth: a feeling of the mysterious.

These ten non-commandments constitute my basic attitude towards reality, towards man's freedom from all kinds of spiritual slavery." *The Rajneesh Upanishad (1986)*.

Back in Poona in January 1987 the frequency and length of his discourses, mostly on Zen and Chan/Zen masters from China to Japan, suggested some urgency in the painting of what was to become the last strokes on his lifelong canvas of Eastern esoteric teachings. However, following his incarceration in the US the last four years saw an increasing deterioration of his health and the periods when he had to stay in his room and could not come to Buddha Hall were steadily becoming longer. Osho's last words spoken in public happened on April 10, 1989, and they are likely to ring a bell in lovers of Advaita:

"Just for a few seconds, close your eyes and remember the path and the source you have found, and the buddha nature that you have experienced.

This moment you are the most blessed people on the earth. Remembering yourself as a buddha is the most precious experience, because it is your eternity, it is your immortality.

It is not you, it is your very existence. You are one with the stars and the trees and the sky and the ocean. You are no longer separate.
The last word of Buddha was, sammasati.
Remember that you are a Buddha – sammasati.
Okay, Maneesha? Yes, Osho." *The Zen Manifesto. Freedom From Oneself (1989).*

Finally we may acknowledge a member of the European intelligentsia by quoting Peter Sloterdijk, German professor and philosopher, who in *Selbstversuch* (1996) writes on Osho:

[choose any language, or translate into Dutch]

"Um keine Zweifel aufkommen zu lassen: Ich halte Rajneesh noch immer für eine der grössten Figuren des Jahrhunderts - er war ein Mann mit Geist, Energie und Spielsinn, wir werden nie wieder seinesgleichen sehen."

"Let there be no doubt on this point: I still do recognize Rajneesh as one of the greatest figures of this century - he was a man of spirit, energy and playfulness, we will never again see anyone like him." (*Own translation*)

Any reader who wishes to move further into Osho's life and work may benefit from having a look at www.oshosourcebook.com and its sister site www.sannyas.wiki. There you'll find ample presentation of text, photos, bibliography and numerous narratives from people who chose to join his caravan. And had the opportunity and guts to do so. For a starter of reading, *I Am The Gate* may suffice, and if a reliable biography is what you're looking for, then *Osho. The Luminous Rebel (2010)* by Vasant Joshi, Indian academic, is a fair choice.

Pierre Evald, Associate Professor, (Anand Neeten).
mail@pierreevald.dk www.pierreevald.dk