

O S H O

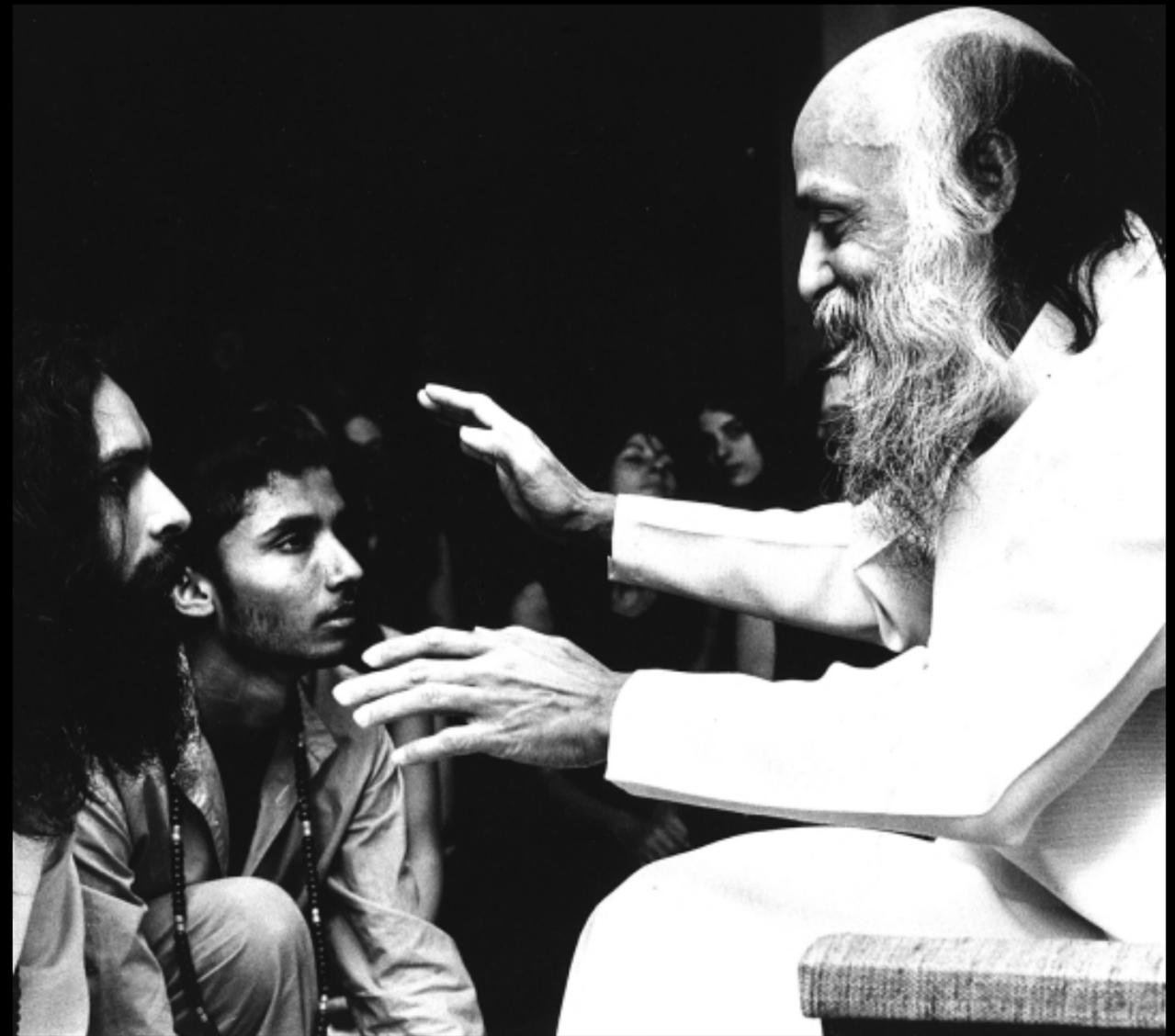
The Controversial Guru

He was labelled the “sex guru” and was known for making racist jokes; **but he taught that the greatest values in life are awareness, love, meditation, celebration, creativity and laughter.** This month YOGA Magazine takes a look at Osho’s life and philosophy. Words: Chico Kidd

Osho, formerly known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, liked to court controversy, but he was undoubtedly a great teacher and an inspirational leader. He called himself a “spiritually incorrect mystic” and disliked the “guru game”; he wanted to cut out the middle-man. His aim of demystifying spirituality and making it accessible to everyone is one that everyone could benefit from. Osho himself wanted to be seen as nothing but a teacher, and his greatest skill in that role was to make spiritual texts and teachings real. Recognising that our busy modern lives are not really conducive to sitting under a tree or in a remote mountain

cave, he adapted the techniques of meditation to suit.

According to Osho, awareness, love, meditation, celebration, creativity and laughter are the most valuable things in life, and few of us would want to argue with that. He also said that enlightenment is everyone’s natural state, but that we are distracted by thought, emotional ties, society’s expectations, and the consequent fears and inhibitions; in short, all the baggage of a 21st-century life. Hence his mission to bring meditation to us all by developing new forms. The best-known is probably Dynamic Meditation, which usually starts with strenuous physical activity followed by silence and celebration. This leads the students to overcome repression, lower their personal inhibitions, develop a “state of emptiness”, and attain enlightenment.



*Osho (Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh)
1931 - 1990*

His teachings can be called a form of Monism — that God is in everything and everyone, and people, even at their worst, are divine. He also believed that national, religious, gender and racial divisions are destructive, which we today may think is pretty obvi-

ous, although we do not tend to emphasise the fact by making offensive jokes, as Osho famously did. He insulted just about every ethnic and religious group in the world, explaining that the purpose was to shock people and encourage them to examine their

“The Buddha is nobody’s monopoly, it is nobody’s copyright. It is everybody’s innermost being. You don’t have to be a Buddhist to be a Buddha. To be a Buddha transcends all concepts of religion; it is everybody’s birthright.”

identification with, and attachment to, their religion or ethnicity.

Osho was born Rajneesh Chandra Mohan in 1931 in Kuchwara in central India. He did not take the name Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh until 1971. "Bhagwan", depending on which source you consult, means either "The Blessed One" or "God" and "Shree" means "Master". At the end of his life, he changed his name to Osho.

He lived with his maternal grandparents until the age of seven, and said the freedom his grandmother gave him was a major influence, leaving him carefree, without restrictions or even an imposed education. When he returned to his parents after this he received a similar kind of support from his paternal grandfather, with whom he was able to be very open. As a student he was rebellious, but gifted, and won the title of All-India Debating Champion, after which he started public speaking — taking part in the the annual Sarva Dharma Sammelan, organised by the Taranpanthi Jain community into which he was born, from 1951 to 1968. But the Jain community finally stopped inviting him because of his radical ideas.

According to Osho's writings, he became spiritually enlightened on 21 March 1953, when he was 21 years old. Going out one night to a garden, he sat under a tree, and "The moment I entered the garden everything became luminous, it was all over the place — the benediction, the blessedness. I could see the trees for the first time — their green, their life, their very sap running. The whole garden was asleep, the trees were asleep. But I could see the whole garden alive, even the small grass leaves were so beautiful.

I looked around. One tree was tremendously luminous — the maulshree tree. It attracted me, it pulled me towards itself. I had

"OSHO" is derived from ancient Japanese. "O" means "with great respect, love and gratitude" as well as "synchronicity" and "harmony". "SHO" means "multidimensional expansion of consciousness" and "existence showering from all directions".

not chosen it, god himself has chosen it. I went to the tree, I sat under the tree. As I sat there things started settling. The whole universe became a benediction."

He graduated in 1955, becoming an M.A. in philosophy in 1957, which he then taught until 1966 at Jabalpur University. During this time, he also travelled throughout India, giving lectures critical of socialism and Gandhi, and in 1962 he began to lead meditation camps. The first meditation centres (Jivan Jagruti Kendras) started to emerge around his teaching, then known as the Life Awakening Movement (Jivan Jagruti Andolan). This was followed by a foundation to support his work, established in Mumbai by a group of Osho's friends.

In 1968, he scandalised Hindu leaders by calling for freer acceptance of sex; the following year he enraged pretty much

everyone else by criticising all organised religion and the institution of priesthood. In later years, his libertarian views on sex and emotional expression (and behaviour in his ashram) caused considerable consternation both in India and the U.S. Not an institution to play down anything smacking of scandal, the western press bizarrely claimed that Bhagwan, a traditional title for spiritual teachers in India, meant "Master of the Vagina".

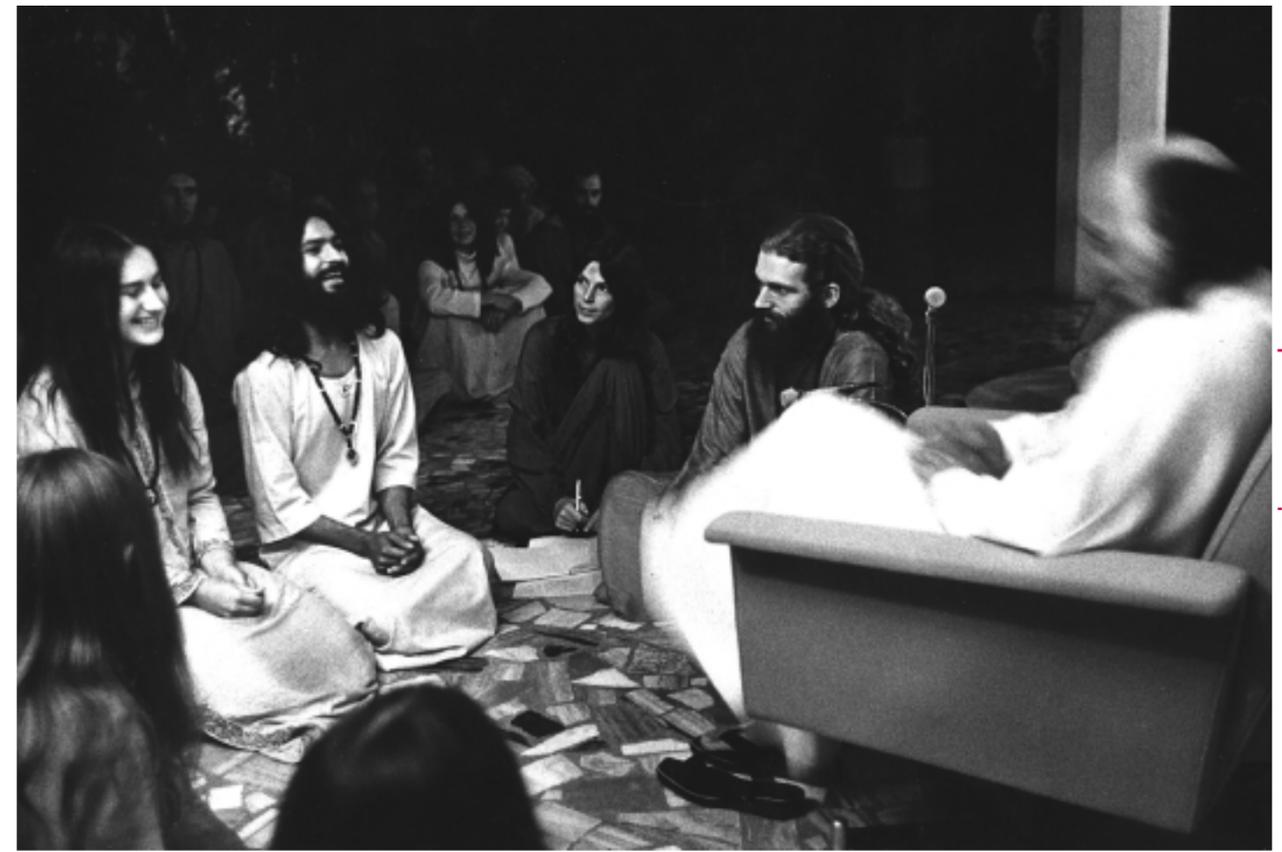
The climate of Mumbai proving bad for Osho's delicate health, the group moved in 1974 to a newly-purchased property in Koregaon Park, in the city of Pune (formerly spelt Poona). Pune had long been the secondary residence of many wealthy Mumbai families because of its cooler climate, being drier and cooler. This became the nucleus of an ashram and is the heart of the present-day Osho International Meditation Resort.

Osho taught at the Pune Ashram until 1981. In 1980, during one of his discourses, an attempt on his life was made by a Hindu fundamentalist, and the following year he left India, reluctantly, because of health problems.

He went to the US in search of medical treatment (he suffered from asthma, diabetes and severe back problems), and the group settled on the "Big Muddy Ranch" near Antelope, Oregon, which was renamed Rajneeshpuram ("City of Rajneesh"). Many locals were intolerant, denying building permits.

In the same year, Osho began a three-and-a-half-year period of self-imposed public silence. During this time satsangs (silent sitting, with some readings from his works and music) replaced his daily discourses. He lived in a trailer in Rajneeshpuram as the

"The psychologist William James, has coined a new word for spiritual experience, the 'oceanic' experience. He is perfectly right. It is the experience of expansion, all boundaries disappearing farther and farther and farther away. A moment comes when you don't see any boundaries to you; you become the ocean itself. You are, but you are no more in a prison. You are, but you are no more in a cage. You have come out of the cage, you have come out of the prison, and you are flying into the sky in total freedom."



TEACHERS

commune's guest; but over the next few years, he became notorious all over again for the large number of Rolls-Royces his followers bought for him — they wanted to buy 365 of them, one for each day of the year, and he ended up with over 90. Courting controversy, Osho said he was “the rich man's guru”, and that material poverty was not a spiritual value.

Osho resumed his daily public discourses in 1985, but all was far from well in the commune. Conflicts with neighbours and the state of Oregon increased, and the commune's management became involved in more and more outrageous and criminal activities including wiretapping, conspiracy to murder public officials, the attempted murder of Osho's own physician, and a even a salmonella attack on local citizens. The guilty parties fled for Europe in September; in October, Osho himself was arrested in North Carolina as he was allegedly fleeing the U.S. Accused of minor immigration violations, Osho was given a suspended sentence on condition that he leave the country.

He then began a world tour, although more than twenty countries refused to grant him an entry visas. However, Nepal, Greece and Uruguay, among others, welcomed him and he finally returned to India in July 1986. In the following January, he resumed discoursing at his old ashram in Pune. At the end of 1988, he took the name Osho.

On January 19, 1990, Osho died at the age of 58, heart failure being the official cause; he had claimed that his declining health was caused by poison administered to him by the U.S. authorities during the twelve days he was held without bail in various U.S.

prisons. His ashes were placed in the ashram: the epitaph reads, “OSHO. Never Born, Never Died. Only Visited this Planet Earth between Dec 11 1931 – Jan 19 1990.”

Osho was undoubtedly controversial, and equally undoubtedly, he courted controversy deliberately. He has been dubbed “a guru of hedonism, an impresario of spiritual Mardi Gras”. But he was also a man of great intelligence, erudition, and charisma; a professor of philosophy, a lover of literature, and the author of a body of work that explains the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures in language accessible to all. These books are his great legacy, and Osho is one of only two authors whose entire works have been placed in the Library of India's National Parliament in New Delhi. The other is Mahatma Gandhi.

For more information on the Osho Meditation Resort visit www.osho.com.

Don't miss next month's issue of YOGA Magazine where we speak to one of OSO's contemporaries, Swami [name tbc]

