

A Rose By Any Other Name...

*by Anasya Atkins
(Ma Anand Anasya)*

Can names such as Jesus, Lao Tsu, Buddha, or Osho (the Indian mystic then known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh who traveled to Oregon in the early 80's to establish a commune there) be copyrighted by a group of individuals?

Legal precedent is being made by a group called Osho Deepta, a nonprofit organization based in California. Their attempts to thwart the current ownership of registration of trademarks by another group who call themselves Osho International Foundation (OIF) is causing a more than a “brau haha” locally. It is challenging the law on an international level. The topic receiving the most attention is the use of the name “Osho” and do groups have the right to profit from the use of such revered and commonly used names?

Should the name of a mystic, holy personage, or historically regarded “enlightened being” be “fair game” for those interested in financial ventures which would require registration fees or specific permission for the use of that name? This is the heart of what is now a growing battle between the two groups.

Stories of the conflict began appearing in the Indian press back in 1999 when a prominent member of the Commune in India, Ma Yoga Neelam (all names used are sannyasin names and are not legal names) and members of her family and other close associates also influential in the decision making processes within the Commune, were effectively “banned” from the Commune. The barring of Ma Neelam, Swami Chaitanya Keerti, and others by the Commune is allegedly a result of Ma Neelam's speaking out to the Indian media regarding concerns about behaviors and decisions being made by a small group of individuals who constitute OIF whose leader is Canadian born Swami Jayesh. Osho Foundation International which is in Zurich, Switzerland, is comprised of Swami Jayesh (Canadian), Swami Amitro (British), Swami Pramod (German), Swami Sahajanand (German), Swami Mukesh (Indian).

OFI handles publishing and registration issues within the Osho International Foundation group (which has its home offices in New York City) and is falling under increasingly heavy criticism from not only Ma Neelam but a growing number of Osho sannyasins worldwide.



Team management person Swami Satya Vedant has been representing the India Commune and supports the Zurich based foundation, OFI. Swami Satya Vedant has allegedly said the publishing issues are best represented in New York, the heart of the publishing world internationally. Ma Yoga Neelam has further accused all involved in OFI as being 'a dictatorship' who are not representing Osho and his wishes and further alleges the individuals comprising OFI are making decisions based on their own personal projections and personal greed.

Osho, Indian mystic and holy man, was born Rajneesh Chandra Mohan in 1931. (Osho changed his name one year prior to his death to Osho, which is a William James quote meaning “oceanic experience”). He was a university professor at Jabalpur University for 9 years and orator in Bombay where he began capturing attention. Many people throughout the world began traveling to India to sit in “darshan” with the mystic. Darshan is an ancient tradition of a Master sitting with His disciples, speaking to them in an intimate setting of discourse. The people attracted to the words, which are neither teachings nor religious dogmas, Osho called his “neo-sannyasins” (another revival of an ancient Indian tradition which dates back centuries and describes the Master/disciple relationship. In the Western world many misconstrue the meaning to be Master/slave). What is at the core of the sannyasins spiritual quest is an emphasis on meditation, which is an active form of ridding oneself of hostility and other destructive emotions and thoughts. Osho shared with his sannyasins a vision for what he called his “New Man,” a merging of eastern and western worlds, being spiritually “aware” through meditation and eastern influences as well as a growing utilization of western technology and affluence. The changing of one's name is representative of a new chapter in one's life. Osho's vision continues in the form of his sannyasins and the Osho Meditation Centers worldwide and the main Osho Commune in the area of Mumbai (Bombay), India.

It could be said that Osho “wrote the book” on meditation. During his years known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, he wrote many books on varying spiritual and mystical subjects. At one time Osho was the largest privately published author in the world. However, rather than being directly written by Osho the books come from transcriptions of Osho's discourses with his disciples, talks usually lasting up to two hours. Intimate and all too human issues were addressed to Osho in the form of questions from his sannyasins who come from all cultures globally. The witty and often brilliant commentaries by Osho to those seeking “answers” to probing questions continue to attract people to present day in the form of his legacy of works, despite his death over ten years ago. Not only are the sale of books, videos, and tapes profitable, there are Osho Meditation Centers all over the world where sannyasins and others flock to enjoy



spiritual trainings and work/meditations which allow for playtime and relaxation in the workplace.

In the Osho Commune no money is used and neither is there competition for jobs or pressures found in other outside job situations. Consequently, participants in these work/meditations often experience profound and rewarding transformations in their attitudes towards life, partnerships, and cooperation with others in the workplace and social environments. Highly experimental in nature and often involving leading therapists from their own prospective countries, workshops called “Groups” are also available which address a number of human potential and growth issues. “Groups” are also a unique blend of the intellectual and physical energy work supportive of the individual. Also available are Osho Meditations, Work/Residency programs, specific trainings in energy and body work, and celebrations, all with the flavor of Osho and his “New Man” vision.

Osho and his sannyasins left Oregon in 1986 after 5 years in the central Oregon desert where they were building their “New Man” city, Rajneeshpuram (referred to as “The Ranch”), amidst controversies that have not, in most sannyasin's eyes, been addressed adequately by US officials to this day.

Right wing politicians and conservative Oregon media challenged the group from the “get-go.” Local farmers shot at the sannyasins Peace Force officer's horses and incidents occurred where sannyasins were run off the road by self appointed militant hostile neighboring ranchers and several times, the car in which Osho (then calling himself Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh) was driving, was also sideswiped by aggressive look-ee-loos.

The sannyasins responded by effectively establishing their own legal interests in nearby Antelope, which later became known as the town of Rajneesh. This assertiveness by the sannyasins in trying to maintain their legal rights was viewed by locals as a “takeover.” Fearing for the security and safety of their gentle “Master”, the Peace Force at the Ranch armed themselves heavily and this action brought more criticism from the press. A resultant climate of fear and hostility on the part of the neighboring townspeople spread to include surrounding areas all the way into Portland, Oregon and up to Seattle, Washington. Statewide, locally invested media began to use their influence by resorting to buzzwords and other tactics whose purpose plainly was to elicit an emotional response from its readership, not to mention it sold papers. Based on mounting tensions on both sides, internal pressures began “splitting the seams” of the Osho organization. A few “higher ups” in the Osho group during those years cracked, culminating with the arrests and eventual deportation of several of Osho's followers--a small group who Osho loudly



proclaimed as “traitors.” Osho himself expelled them from the Commune and took away their “malas” (wooden beads with his photo symbolizing their sannyasin acceptance and fulfillment of meditation requirements). They were condemned severely by Osho as violators of his peaceful, pro-life Commune, and he further asserted that he was “in silence” and drugged by them throughout much of their goings-on and did not know of some events that his appointed sannyasins had been perpetrating in order to stay in Rajneeshpuram or to protect their endeavors to keep the Commune afloat.

Osho was also then targeted by the US Federal government and he was ultimately charged with marriage fraud and being in the US illegally by the INS, the regulatory group within the US government in charge of immigration violations. This action was due to many marriages by foreign sannyasins to US citizen sannyasins in order for them to remain in America and stay on as active members of the desert Cooperative. While a small percentage of these marriages were questionable as are all marriages to US citizens by foreigners, great pains were taken to make them legitimate bonding of the two people involved and most traveled to the foreign home countries to meet their new family. Osho himself had sought US legal sanctuary due to his love of religious freedom and what he had hoped would be fair and equitable treatment from a government known historically for their “justice.”

Sannyasins found it impossible to obtain building permits and other rights as a result of living in the Commune which was the controversial Oregon Precinct #42. Legal forces at “the Ranch” began to focus on their voting privileges in order to combat these fierce prejudices locally. Sannyasins retaliated also by bussing into “the Ranch” (as they came to call Rajneeshpuram) droves of homeless people and calling all US citizens to the Ranch to lend their support. Always a drug-free environment, the sanctity of Rajneeshpuram was somewhat briefly compromised by these homeless people when sannyasins found they had smuggled drugs in to their Ranch. This foreign element did not integrate as well as the sannyasins had hoped (their entry into Rajneeshpuram, like many of the experimental undertakings at the Ranch, was multi-leveled). Although a few did take sannyas and may still be sannyasins today. This program of bussing in the homeless drained the Ranch's resources which were already feeling the strain from legal entanglements and court battles.

When in the 1984 Reagan Presidential election sannyasins had their vote taken away. Sannyasins actually refused to be interviewed by lawyers HIRED by the county in the Dalles, the Wasco county seat as to the validity of their residency because the county wanted them to travel to the Dalles, using their own resources--busses, etc -- which they refused to do. Another example of an ongoing series of legal maneuverings



by Wasco County officials who were contesting their residency (the law said a 20 day residency requirement and the very legislators who had enacted that law were now the ones contesting it!). Many sannyasins picketed peacefully and the local television stations in the Pacific Northwest covered the events.

Many US sannyasins still recall the year they were NOT ALLOWED TO VOTE in their own country's presidential election (the second Reagan term), their home county's election, some of whom owned property in Oregon).

During his 5 years in Oregon Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was the number one headliner in the Oregon media, his name and photograph appearing in several rather derogatory pieces on *Saturday Night Live's* news spots on national television. Both sannyasins and local forces were tied in a deadlock for many years which the sannyasins ultimately could not withstand, especially with the Federal government now involved.

Being tipped off of eminent legal charges by his attorneys, Osho and his entourage were detained in North Carolina on a private plane stopover to refuel while still legally en route out of America. Osho was manacled and taken away by US officials for 6 days without benefit of legal counsel (his attorney was in fact traveling with him). Osho later made allegations that he was not only illegally detained for many days, but that his health was compromised in such a way that this contributed to his early death in 1990 where he was back in Pune, India. He repeatedly claimed he was poisoned by a slow acting, nervous system poison which he calimed would kill him in 5 years. (Osho was to die of mysterious symptoms exactly as he predicted and 5 years later)

For a group whose intent was to be as far away from opposing forces and whose choice was a desolate and initially almost uninhabitable 64,000 acre parcel of land far from civilization, it was a devastating relinquishing of work, sacrifice, and dreams. Their much loved homeland, which most resembled a (non Jewish) kibbutz of sorts, was blooming in comeback plantings, flower gardens, a dairy, truck farm, roads, buildings, hotels and an airstrip with several jets, swimming lake, and other facilities, was sold at a loss and now lies abandoned. This amazing experimental city in the desert is once more a desolate, dusty and useless wasteland with little trace of the thriving and affluent community it once was.

This was how America treated a grandiose experiment in alternative lifestyle.

News now comes of a break once again within the Commune's inner ranks.

The original India Commune, lushly set on 35 plus acres has been based in India since Oslo's early years. As a fiery young man with a rare eloquence and insight into sacred teachings of various other "enlightened beings", the young Acharya Rajneesh's



(first “official” name change) group of early sannyasins began the then called “ashram” 30 years ago in Poona (now called Pune), an affluent area called Korregan Park, several hours train ride from Mumbai (formerly Bombay).

Even during the Oregon years, the Indian Commune, although shifting into a background presence, was a functioning realm for its members, especially those of Indian heritage unable to travel to the US to be a part of Rajneeshpuram. The ashram has updated to the new millenium by calling itself a “meditation resort” and can be found online at www.Osho.com.

Since the banning of Ma Neelam, Swami Chaitanya Keerti and others, a legal battle began to take shape which is effectively causing a separation of factions within the sannyasin community world wide. Stirring questions are being raised about motives of a small minority within the Commune and for some sannyasins, memories of their Oregon internal problems are resurfacing as “lessons learned” and not to be tolerated a second time.

The Commune in Pune self organizes and is primarily self contained.

In a country often fraught with health risks and unsanitary conditions, the environment is sparkling clean and a vision of grace and design. It has run effectively and generally smoothly since its inception. In matters pertaining to the needs of its sannyasins to undertake meditations and individual spiritual expansion, there has not been many ripples. Most controversy previously has been due to clashes with governmental agencies unhappy to be hosting the colorfully clad, creative, above average educated, and generally forthright and articulate sannyasins.

Speaking out for their rights in various situations seems to be their ongoing legacy and is done in almost every language.

There is an insistence by sannyasins that their movement is unlike that of any other, therefore not able to be compared to what generally comes to most people's minds regarding a group involved in “spiritual quests.” Outsiders constantly equate their group with “cults”, complete with all the negative aspects of “cults.” Unlike other groups, they emphasize that this is NOT a religion, contacts with family is encouraged by the Commune, and there is no exploitation to “give up” worldly goods. In fact success, prosperity, and self-sufficiency are stressed.

Unlike other groups clamoring for members, sannyasins require a period of meditation, sometimes quite lengthy-- if one is accepted AT ALL-- until it is felt (by a constantly changing hierarchy of coordinators) a person is able to function both in unison and in cooperation with the other members and is as a whole free from derogatory and destructive emotions. One is encouraged through daily meditation to leave past hurts



behind and stay “in the moment” while mixing with the people from various cultures and heritages, often these differences being the brunt of joking and many cultural teasings by all, which seems to dissipate any inherent forms of bigotry or racism found elsewhere in the world's climate of unrest. Osho, when he was alive, set the precedent by in his darshans cracking jokes, telling stories, and “making fun of” all cultures.

When at the Commune there is an emphasis on good health and responsible human interactions. The Commune in Oregon was one of the first place to actively practice “safe sex” with videos and other educational material available to all. Venereal diseases were teased for always, from the early days in India.

Another common misconception, probably having its roots in physically conservative and traditional conservative India, is that Osho's sannyasins are sexually “loose” and engage in “free sex.” At Rajneeshpuram and presently in the India ashram there were and are strict rules about open sexuality and nudity and most sannyasins were happily focused on knocking the mud from their boots from a day of work in the hard working Ranch era. For many, sexuality just was not a priority and yet this misconception has stuck in the minds of many outsiders.

While having all the frailties of human weaknesses, the sannyasins insist on their unique place in history as a viable and contributory “Alternative Society.” Osho's “neo-sannyasins” consider themselves a society “evolving” which blends the functions of everyday living and the “taste” of Osho being actively, quietly, and subtly demonstrated in almost every country and culture in the world. The sannyasin leadership in general is hard-pressed to allow any form of oppression, especially among its own. Standards are remarkably high and conduct carefully monitored with attention given to an individual's particular situation, with encouragement to “celebrate the differences” rather than conform to a norm as in some other groups, validating their claims of uniqueness as a group and non-adherence to any set structure.

There is a truthful sense of fun that permeates through the sannyasins, who appear bright eyed and colorful in their cotton robes of (now) burgundy red, silk scarves, and Indian finery. Working and playing together is not just an ideal, but a reality to them and they seem almost oblivious to their local Indian critics, who openly admit they have little grasp of just what is going on within the confines of the Communal gates.

The group Osho Foundation International has been accused by Ma Neelam of allegedly using their power and status as head of the publishing concerns to surreptitiously operate in allegedly illegal profiteering regarding the OFI's claims that



their foundation alone owns the right's to the name Osho and all profits and rights regarding books, artwork, videos, audio tapes, and other Osho items.

Ma Neelam comes from humble origins in India and when Osho was alive was associated with him since 1969. She served as his personal Secretary, (the highest appointed position within the Commune), close confidante, and often cooked meals for her Indian master.

She was one of his earliest sannyasins and contends that her right as an Indian citizen to enter the Commune for spiritual purposes has been violated. Many sannyasins are in agreement so Ma Neelam and her fellow critics may not remain outside of the Commune long. Certainly the legal challenges may affect the future of all those concerned and the base of power may shift yet again.

The spirit of change seems to be an integral part of the heritage Osho has left for his many sannyasins and the mood is indeed a sincere and laborious one to challenge the current situation on many levels, not just in the courts.

Originally one of the "inner circle" of 21 sannyasins appointed by Osho before his death to protect the interests and functioning of the Commune and it's members, both Ma Neelam and Swami Jayesh (also an "inner circle" member) reportedly have had conflicts for many years, culminating in 1999 when Ma Neelam left the "inner circle" stating personal/health reasons. Ma Neelam, while perhaps citing this reason at the time publicly, many believe may have been in her own way shielding the Commune from controversy, hoping problems would not grow worse or could still be solved within Commune internal ranks.

Of the original 21 appointed sannyasins, only 5 are remaining. They are Swami Jayesh and others who compose the OI Foundation. Ma Neelam has stated this fact in itself indicates the other sannyasins have left due to problems within the "inner circle" and that she remained as long as she did in order to serve as best she could through cooperative means, until that was no longer possible. She says in her statements to the Indian press the problem lies with Swami Jayesh and the others are primarily just his 'dupes'. With her self imposed exit and subsequent "banning" by the Commune, the balance of power has been allegedly left to Swami Jayesh and his cohorts contends Ma Neelam, who Ma Neelam and Chaitanya Keerti and many others adamantly claim are misusing the power they were to administer on Osho's behalf. Further, Swami Jayesh and group are being strongly criticized for their actions by sannyasins living and working in their own personal situations throughout the world. A flood of support for Ma Neelam and her constituency of long time Osho intimates has been steadily pouring in to Osho



Deepta in emails and letters. Many are expressing outrage and concern by the treatment on behalf of the Commune of these longtime friends and assistants to Osho.

Ma Neelam contends that her closeness to Osho and that of her associates, friends and family, seems to be the very reason why she and her closest sannyasin friends, also longtime Osho sannyasins in formerly high ranking positions, are not being admitted through the Commune gates. Known by many sannyasins over the years, Ma Neelam was also a greeter herself for others entering those gates and worked as primary editor of the Hindi versions of Osho publications.

Swami Keerti, too, is an upfront and well spoken man of deep faith and convictions, known by many as a gentle and loving personage who never before found cause to publicly challenge the Commune and its affairs. Many sannyasins are viewing the involvement with the media by Swami Keerti and Ma Neelam and Osho Deepta as a “last ditch effort” and a vital one to halt activities of Osho Foundation International and an effort to inform sannyasins everywhere about their concerns.

Many of these issues surround publishing rights and use of Osho's name and other matters of importance were discussed in detail by Osho to his intimates before his impending death. By most accounts the Indian master wanted free use of his name in describing Osho meditation techniques, specific Osho trainings, and Osho Meditation Centers administering these procedures. The sannyasins travel to these Centers as well as to the Commune in Pune in order to be “close” to their Master, an environment they call “the Buddhafield.”

Osho himself had no “say” in this policy because of the formation of the Osho Foundation International which he was not a part of. Therein lies the legal snag remaining to be hashed out in court.

So there are some “bombs” yet to be dismantled which are deeply buried in Osho's “Buddhafield” before the Commune members in general will again feel it the haven they have come to know and treasure as “safe ground.”

Allocations of fraud and further misconduct surround the paintings of Osho and his well documented words. The Deepta camp claims that Rajneespuram valuables, some Osho art items worth a great deal of money have disappeared or have been altered, that his words in his discourses have been changed, causing an outcry of alarm among sannyasins.

Further charges that specific presentations in newspapers and other sources affiliated with Osho Foundation International and the Commune itself are mentioning only Osho quotations favorable to Americans and showing other Osho quotes displaying the Indian people in an unsavory light. Related undercurrents which are circulating claim



these manipulations are part of the baggage of the politics surrounding the alleged power moves of Swami Jayesh and his small entourage.

Deepta people say that the very heart of the Commune which is based in India and properly belongs in India is allegedly being shifted to more Western influences because of the alleged personal interests and exploitation of IOF to be nearer to US concerns out of convenience for their personal situation and not the spiritual reality that the Commune belongs in India, as Osho wanted at the time of his death.

Swami Jayesh has contended Ma Neelam's speaking to the media was inappropriate to the way the Commune conducts its business and that she herself took time away on her own volition from the Commune. In his own news releases, he remains adamant that the Osho Foundation International is functioning in an orderly and appropriate manner. Most of the "noise" is coming from Deepta, as Swami Jayesh has kept a low profile publicly.

The world is beginning to take note of the core issue at stake in the legal battles because at the heart of the crisis lies basic elements of copyright and name registration law never before addressed or challenged.

Computer law is also a new area which is involved. Already, to date, one court case has been decided against Osho Foundation International and a web site was granted full use of the name "Osho."

Gertrude Stein said, 'a rose is a rose is a rose...'

Or is it? Would "a rose called by any other name (or having to channel through a private Foundation at a cost), smell as sweet?"

Sannyasins, Osho lovers, and people around the globe are asking 'what is in a name?' They are paying astute attention as news begins to build around the welfare of their beloved Master's name, works, and legacy.

Once again they are hearing the clarion bells ringing as their assistance is being sought and the word spreads by media throughout the world. Once more Osho is holding the center spotlight and is spreading fascination and renewed interest and Osho's "New Man" is there, this time with computer and court gavel to heed the call.

Many other sannyasins are scattered around the world and know nothing of the rift in their own group. It lies "buried" on GOOGLE's Osho pages, on page 25.

Time will tell just what will be decided as these issues enter into the courts and as these strong "growing pains" are experienced by the sannyasins and those associated with Osho.



Osho's sannyasins are no strangers to controversy, both from within their own ranks and from governments in both the US and India where the two Communes (one former, one present) have tested legal and human rights in attempting to remain autonomous in the face of legalities and cultures they must integrate with, in order to coexist.

Diplomacy and its compromises does not seem to be their goal or even immediate concerns. However, the search for truth and justice does seem to be within their grasp and over time sannyasins have proved dogged to reach those ideals in many places, countries, and over a multitude of issues.

What is to be the next step in the fate of the sannyasins and their love for the man Osho who they call “their Master?”

Will his name be a marketable commodity on the world exchange?

Will a few people benefit from and retain control of the name of “Osho”? Or does the name belong to all, free and clear to use as Osho wanted, in freedom and dignity?

One thing that Osho and his sannyasins came to know is that beyond what can be legislated are the deeper fundamentals of spiritual devotion and the exercise of human searching for truth, freedom, and inner peace which reside and reach full expression well outside of the law and any courtroom.

If history is any indicator of “staying power” regarding other “enlightened beings”, Osho's legacy will be around a very long time.

True to Osho's wit and vast meandering into sacred writings such as koans (an Eastern phrase for an unanswerable question such as the one more familiar to Westerners: 'which came first the chicken or the egg?'), and his sannyasin's festivals of music and gaiety, perhaps somewhere off in the distance there will be heard the “Sound of One Hand Clapping” (a Zen koan) and in his vision of the “New Man” there will be eternal dancing and celebration...

...with a just few “bumps” along the way.

