

## [Rajneeshism](#)

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World's Newest Religion In Bitter Conflict; Hostilities, Law Issues Worsen as Disciples Clash With Citizens and Government Over Commune

Depending on who you talk with in the rural, central highlands of Oregon in the US, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh is either an enlightened master or "fifth on the devil's chain of command," either the sex guru from India or the ideal man who has transcended human indulgence, either the narcissistic nemesis of the state or mankind's best hope for evolution beyond the bounds of egoism. Half of the people swear by this gentle, bearded man in flowing robes, and the other half swear at him.

"I must be the most misunderstood man in this country at this moment," Rajneesh said a few years back in India. Example: many people mistakenly think he is a Hindu, whereas he is actually an ex-Jain. At that time there were several thousand red-clad devotees living in and around his Poona ashram, most from Western nations and all immersed in his own personal style of spiritual awakening which included, to the vehement dismay of India's orthodox Hindus, sexual "therapies," violent encounter group sessions, frenzied mass meditations and nudity. A public outcry rose, rancor spread and Rajneesh perceived that tradition-bound India was not ready for him or his vision.

On June 1, 1981, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, traveling on a visitor's visa which would later become the source of a legal imbroglio, landed in New York with thirteen tons of luggage. Some wondered if it was perhaps more than a visit, and indeed he later determined to remain in America and share his ideal of Homo novus, the "New Man" who is as earthy as Zorba the Greek and as supernal as Gautama the Buddha. He had come for health reasons that included severe asthma, allergies, back trouble and perhaps even cancer. The Poona ashram, fragmented by his sudden and unexpected departure, was reduced to a few hundred of the most faithful. In August of that same year, noting that his asthma had been aggravated by the New Jersey humidity, his American disciples purchased over 100 square miles of arid, almost austere ranch lands near

Antelope, Oregon, for \$6 million—the single largest private acreage ever purchased in the state. It was their gift, offered to him as a "reflection of the love and wisdom he showers on us."

Here, at last, the Poona experiment could continue and manifest more purely. "America," the master was convinced, "is the best place...on the verge of a great step; if a new step is going to happen anywhere, it is going to happen in America." Thus, on a sagebrush and pine tree wasteland which nobody else wanted, far along dirt roads from the nearest real city, was born the little town of Rajneeshpuram. It was lauded by Rajneeshes as "the beginning of new humanity," "a material and spiritual oasis," a "totally new, experimental society" where man could live right, live well, live fully and consciously, in harmony with himself and with the world. It was, and is, a vast and worthy vision. The question being bitterly contested on the legal and cultural battlegrounds of Oregon is simply this: are the bright, well-endowed and obviously determined Rajneeshes lofty visionaries ushering in the New Age of Enlightenment, or are they elitist, lawless, insolent Don Quixotes jousting at their own notion of the way things are (or should be). Rajneesh himself is now waiting for the outcome of several lawsuits, unsure of whether he will be deported, of whether his utopian commune will be allowed to exist. Meanwhile, contractors continue to build furiously at Rancho Rajneesh while a corps of attorneys hold the opposition at bay.

Oregon's Utopian adventure: The story of Rajneesh and his new religion is a dream, wrapped in a controversy and hidden in a mystique. First, the dream. A desolate and remote expanse of sagebrush 190 km. from Portland has been chosen as the site of Rajneeshpuram. An "oasis" it is not. Rather, one is struck immediately by its barren, eroding landscape and a dry threat to all aspiring life. It was once known as Big Muddy Ranch, overgrazed by cattle too severely to be used again economically (without, that is, a massive financial composting). Rajneesh and 1,500 of his most faithful are doing something quite remarkable here. Even detractors admire the speed and scope of their accomplishments. Since July of 1981 they have: built a dam and a complete watershed system to support their community (quelling the county's claims of insufficient water); completed their own road system; erected modern, pre-fabricated homes; installed electrical and sewage disposal systems; opened a dairy (52 Holsteins) and chicken (3,000, for the eggs only) facility; started a small airline (Air Rajneesh) with three prop planes and two private jets; built a full-scale printing and publishing facility (with a weekly newspaper); planted 10 acres of fruit and nut trees (1,500), not to mention 15,000 shade trees; planted 2,700 acres in grain crops and 50 acres in vegetables for which six greenhouses were erected; cleared land for a 10-acre vineyard; erected a 30,000 square-foot mall that includes an ice cream parlor, pizzeria, beauty parlor, pancake house, travel agency and movie theater; installed a car repair garage,

welding shop, carpentry shop and 38 residential quadruplexes, all air-conditioned; and held a \$9 million International Celebration in July of 1982 for 15,000 members. In all, the Rajneeshees have spent a phenomenal \$60 million so far, and plan to pump another \$100 million into the commune in the next four years. Not bad for a little town of 1,200 youthful men and women; and that's the major reckoning, not the whole list by any means. Clearly, this is not your do-you-have-any-spare-change hippy camp, but a vigorous, well-executed, highly organized and diverse commune. Its religious basis, work-ethic and economic drive/development bring to mind the kibbutzes, the communal farms of Israel—a comparison that extends to the ideal of supporting life in even the most unforgiving soils and circumstances. Indeed, the Rajneeshees are much like the small, early Christian sects who sought to turn deserts into gardens, inwardly and outwardly.

Roses Have Thorns: So why aren't the good people of Oregon proud of all this? Why aren't they giving their new residents Beautification Awards and Welcome Wagon greetings? Some of them are. There are plenty of Oregonians who appreciate the Rajneeshees, even if they don't really comprehend them. They like the influx of money which is keeping dozens of small businessmen afloat during hard times - such businessmen are understandably among the most ardent defenders of the commune, so the relationship is symbiotic. They like the verve, the quality of work, the plain grit that anybody in his right mind has to muster to make a place like Big Muddy pay the bills. Many like the sheer magnitude of the undertaking and the earthy pragmatism exhibited by the Rajneeshees, a no-nonsense approach that succeeds. Where is there a red-blooded American who doesn't appreciate success?

Right here in Oregon, that's where. Rajneeshpuram has far more detractors than supporters, and "opposition has increased ten-fold in the past 12 months." Despite all they have done, all is not sweetness and light at Rancho Rajneesh. Conflicts run deep and legal bills are high. Said one man, "They are smart, and they are relentless. They've got a platoon of lawyers who jump up everytime something happens around here." The people of Antelope, once a sleepy town of 45 country folk, are angry at the redclad invaders who teemed into their community, overpowered them politically and economically, harassed them legally and psychologically. A popular bumper sticker one sees on farmer's trucks superimposes a shooting gallery target over Rajneesh's face and boasts, "Better Dead than Red," (a slur that misses the target, for the commune is dedicated to the "natural" principles of capitalism, at least in spirit).

The Rajneeshees are criticized for anything they do, some of the more notably

superficial objections being the group's public hugging and kissing habits, the master's name, his diamond watch, a fleet of Rolls-Royces and his silence—a truly authentic and important spiritual practice in many religions.

Confrontations abound. The county of Wasco which gave Rajneeshpuram the first city charter in 50 years on May 18, 1983, is now worried that thousands of residents in a new city will cost tax-payers millions of dollars. It seems that the Rajneeshes assured the Wasco County officials that, if their city charter were granted, they would bear all of the costs of sewage, water, electricity and roads. However, in recent weeks Rajneeshpuram has been asking the county to help with the roads, leaving the question of future support of Rajneeshpuram's infrastructure up in the air. The tax-payers don't like the idea of their hard-earned dollars going to help a religious commune that happens to call itself a city.

At the state level, the Attorney General, David Frohnmeyer, is after Rajneesh, too. Spokesperson Marla Rae told The New Saivite World that the AG's office had responded to a request by State Representative Mike McCracken to review the issue of separation of church and state. Said Mrs. Rae, "It is our opinion that the city of Rajneeshpuram's receiving state funds violates this separation. It is religion exercising the powers of government." After some bitter exchanges with Rajneesh representatives, the AG's office filed suit in November with the Oregon Circuit Court, asking for Declaratory relief.

On December 9th, 1983, lawyers representing the four Rajneesh corporations, the city and the commune, filed a motion that took the matter into the Federal District Court where they felt they would get a more even-handed and cool-headed judgement. A judge has been assigned, attorneys are now working out the ground rules and the matter will be litigated in the months ahead. Said the AG's office, "The state seeks a judicial determination of the church/state issues" including whether a town constituted solely of members of a single religion can spend government monies and exercise the powers of government. The New Saivite World confirmed with representatives of Rajneeshpuram that every signal resident of the city is a disciple and every square inch of property is owned by the commune, leased to members. The AG was careful to not include the tortuous land use and development issues, which are the main concerns of such groups as the 1000 Friends of Oregon.

Land Use Issues: The 1000 Friends of Oregon rank among the most formidable of

Rajneeshpuram's opponents. Founded in 1975 under the auspices of former Gov. Tom McCall, this watchdog group is trying to ensure that Oregon will remain lush, green and beautiful. It monitors development state wide and seeks to implement Oregon's very elaborate land-use laws. This dog has sharp teeth. Of 82 cases in which the 1000 Friends have taken to a decision in court, they have prevailed in 73. Oregonians are justifiably proud of their lovely state and willing to work hard to keep it that way.

Why would a public interest group dedicated to keeping Oregon beautiful object, and with great vehemence, to the desert-into-gardens Rajneesh experiment which is so environmentally sound? Good question, we thought. So we asked Bob Stacey, Portland based attorney representing 1000 Friends. "That question is part of the 'keeping things pretty' philosophy," Mr. Stacey offered. "Developers often tell a community they will plant trees, make things better, more beautiful than before. But it is really a question of land use. Why should land which the state has set aside for agricultural use be used for urban development? We are against urbanization and development in this case because their plans are inconsistent with existing state law...Sure, they have done good job, especially at identifying adequate water sources, but their use is still inappropriate."

1000 Friends has been involved in this dispute for over two years and are convinced that they will prevail, though it may be years in the courts. Mr. Stacey said that in September all revenues that would have normally gone to a legitimate city (from taxes, state and federal coffers) had been impounded, to be held in escrow until the matter was settled by the Land Use Board of Appeals. As of today, he offered, Rajneeshpuram is not a legal city, "it does not exist." A judgement against the city could require many of the 1,500 residents to leave, since 1000 Friends says the legal limit is around 350. Asked what that would mean for the urban structures already in place, Stacey said that 1000 Friends had filed a petition in court to deem all development approved by the "city" as unlawful. "We are asking for the removal of all unlawful improvements," he explained, "but that is a long way down the road." Should such an order come from the courts, it would mean the loss of tens of millions of dollars for the Rajneeshees, who Stacey warned, have been duly notified of that possibility and are "taking their chances...racing to build everything they can while things are unclear." Does that mean a corps of D-9 Caterpillars would one day be brought into town to level some of it? our research staff inquired. Offered Stacey: "Well, I guess it could come to that. I'm sure there would be plenty of volunteers to drive them."

The United States federal government is on Rajneesh's case, too. The Immigration

and Naturalization Service (INS) is determining whether he should be deported, since his visitor's visa is only temporary, or whether he can stay under another classification. The Rajneesh lawyers are lucubrating, and have made applications in three categories as religious leader, man of exceptional abilities in arts and sciences and unskilled worker. One application is a stupefying 8,000 pages long (including 3,000 letters on Rajneesh's behalf) and another is a paltry 3,000. Needless to say it may be a long time before the INS can digest all that and issue a determination. Said a Rajneeshee representative, Ma Prem Sunshine, "This is a modern day crucifixion. They let in people with prison records, and yet they won't let in this great man." She confided that an insider at INS has managed to get hold of a long cable from the Bombay consulate "stating emphatically" that Rajneesh did not enter the US with the intention of staying, a major issue since the INS is accusing him of entering on a temporary visa with intent to stay permanently. "We suspect the INS is being pressured," Ma Sunshine offered. By whom? "Well, by Senator Hatfield and others...Hatfield sent a letter to the Antelope mayor saying that the best way to get a cult out of an area is through the land use laws," came the reply.

The Anti-Cult Cult: Rabid Christian fundamentalists are out to get Bhagwan Rajneesh at any cost and so-called anti-cult groups are having a heyday. Calling him the "antichrist" and worse, many normally tolerant Oregonians have succumbed to the inflammatory cries of a few and are working day and night to get this "alien cult" out of the state. One such group, headed by Joanne Bois, an Albany housewife, has spent months going from county fairs to Tupperware parties collecting signatures on petitions calling for the state legislature to pass their Alien Cult Bill. They probably won't succeed, but they now have 31,000 out of the required 62,000 to bring the matter to the floor. Mrs. Bois intoned time and again to *The New Saivite World*, "I am not a bigot." To her and to the 600 people on her mailing list, the Rajneeshees are strange, foreign to all that is familiar and secure. She and her friends "want them removed from Oregon." In her exuberance, Mrs. Bois will accuse the Rajneeshees of just about anything from being a "New Age Movement" (said in tones that make it clear how devilish she thinks such movements are), to meddling in politics, to being suspiciously tight with the CIA. "Have you heard anything about Rajneesh being a Jew?" she inquired with feigned ingenuousness. Mrs. Bois is very sincere and very concerned, but she could find more straightforward ways to express her doubts and fears. There are thousands in Oregon who share her dead of the unfamiliar and who turn that fear into anger and hatred against the intruders who all dress in red and seem due in part to their high profile and in part to their real numerical strength-to be swarming like Africanized, "killer," honeybees all over Oregon, getting into the bonnets of good citizens like Mrs. Bois.

So bad have the tensions become and so flagrant the lies and rumors spread, that the state Committee for the Humanities sponsored a 1983 Summer Research Project to provide an objective analysis of Rajneesh's teachings and their social and ethical implications. Professor Ronald O. Clarke of the Department of Religious Studies, Oregon State University, completed the year-long study and was compelled by the circumstances to decry all of the misunderstandings that were circulating, including the anti-cult fear campaigns and the flagrant violations of religious freedoms protected by the Constitution. He called for moderation on both sides, for "tolerance, civility, self-restraint and, if possible, magnanimity and understanding in responding to the Rajneesh phenomenon." He noted that "a number of sociologists and religious studies scholars have recently warned that an anti-cult hysteria (characterized by ignorance, fear and prejudice) is currently sweeping our society" which is viewed as "a potentially serious threat to one of our most cherished Constitutional guarantees: the right of religious liberty and freed of religious expression." ISKCON is another victim of this crusade, which the American Civil Liberties Union decries as "religious discrimination [which] the First Amendment forbids

Fighting Back is Fun: If Bhagwan Rajneesh is beleaguered and belittled-and he most definitely is-it is not all the other guy's fault. Professor Clarke explained to the NSW editor that the Tantric traditions which form the roots of this new faith, though venerable and legitimate, are nonetheless "counter-cultural." In other words, the very basis of the belief structure of Rajneeshism encourages confrontation with existing social orders. Professor Clarke considers that "The conflicts go very deep. Tantric tradition is profoundly anti-social and militates against accommodation...I could see the possibility of some rapprochement, but I don't see them [the Rajneeshees] taking that path. Rather, they are challenging the opposing values at every turn, fighting back and using the courts aggressively to their fullest capacity."

Ideologically, the Rajneeshees are counter-culturalists; and they are true to that doctrine even when it would seem to be against their own best interests. It may well be their undoing in the conservative backwoods east of the Cascades. They have intimidated and bad-mouthed just about everybody who ever questioned their ways. On one night Bhagwan Rajneesh's personal secretary and powerful leader within the commune, Ma Anand Sheela (an Indian by birth) took charge at a public meeting of concerned citizens in Antelope. The wife of a man who had recently committed suicide was in the audience with her child. In foul and brazen terms, Ma Anand told the whole gathering that the real reason for the suicide was infidelity and that the mother should be "honest" with her little girl and tell her the truth. Mother and child fled in tears. Such displays of acid-rhetoric are common in the group, who openly suggest their neighbors are ignorant bigots who should mind

their own business.

Said a knowledgeable Oregonian commenting on the left-handed Tantric path that forms the basis of Rajneeshism, "It holds the notion that life is absurd, that you can do anything you want because it doesn't make any difference ultimately. Life is a joke." If so, it can be a cruel joke and Oregonians are not laughing. Onlookers who otherwise admire the Rajneeshees admit that verbal assaults call into question their values. Where is the humility that comes with inner maturity, let alone enlightenment? The compassion? The gentle heartedness? There is an old proverb that asks the question: Does a man really look taller when he is standing on the head of a fellow human being?

Bhagwan himself is the master of the brazen and the bizarre. Here is a collection of "inciteful" remarks: "The family is the biggest hindrance to human progress. It is the basic unit of the nation, of the state, of the church...of all that is ugly...If we are to save the future of humanity, then all these religions [major world faiths] have to be destroyed...I don't think marriage is anything sacred. It is just an institution and a working partnership of the business world...Just as murder is considered by the society, the birth of the child should be considered by the commune. The commune should decide how many children it wants. The commune should decide which partners should be allowed to have children. To give birth to a cripple child, to give birth to a blind child, to give birth to a mentally retarded child is a crime, as much a crime as murder...I say unto you, first be selfish, utterly selfish. You can help others only if you have helped yourself first...Marriage is a crutch. Marriage makes you crippled, you are an independent being no more, your individuality is lost...Right now there are 300 religions in the world and almost all of them are dead. Just a few have a little life...The Jews create Hitlers, they're always in search of Hitlers."

The question of whether Rajneesh's teachings are anti-Semitic is a serious one to the Jewish community, especially since a full 40% of the Rancho Rajneesh neo-Sannyasins are disenchanting Jews. At noon on January 11, 1984, the Jewish leaders gathered in Portland to assess the problem. When the Rajneesh people invited them to discuss the issues, rabbis requested more of Rajneesh's material relating to the Jews so they could fully study the matter. An angry reply and refusal to send the date came back from the commune. "I have to wonder why they gave that kind of response," Rabbi Emanuel Rose of Portland's temple Beth Israel told The New Saivite World. He and his community are worried and want to understand. "He has accused the Jews of being responsible for the death of Jesus, condemned us for that and sad that to make it right the Jews must accept Jesus...His teachings



are a throwback. Even Vatican II and the Protestants have modified their views on this issue," offered Rabbi Rose. Adding that he knew of no Portland people involved in the commune, he expressed concern for the "surprisingly high" proportion of Jews among the members and said his community is "indeed concerned" and will evaluate the written literature before meeting again on February 8th.

Rajneesh and his followers have created, or at the very least participated in, a great divisiveness in Oregon, a "we/they" dichotomy which they claim is exactly what is supposed to be transcended through the practice of their religion. When asked about the apparent contradiction between the teachings and the Oregon and Poona experiences, spokesperson Ma Prem Sunshine (who is as bright as her name) proposed that "the resistance is on their side," obviously not aware that her answer merely affirmed the contradiction. No doubt chosen for her geniality and eloquence, Ma Sunshine is an avid defender of the faith. She carefully explained that the Rajneeshees were involved in a "culture clash with the people of Antelope" who up until 1981 "were a bunch of old, fundamentalist alcoholics who were just subsisting, just waiting to die." The Rajneeshees on the other hand are "creative, spontaneous and alive - just the opposite." Ma Prem says that the Antelope natives "saw our aliveness, our creativity and our joy and this stirred them. It was a clash of two belief systems." Later in the interview Ma sunshine made it clear that the Rajneeshees see themselves like the Socratic gadflies of modern-day America, like the persecuted early Christians. It is not their mission to get along with the indolence and anxiety that others are wracked with, she suggested, but, like Socrates, to tell the truth even when it hurts - the truth which the Rajneeshees feel the world needs and will be the better for having heard. With such unbending views on either side, it may be a long time before Oregon and its newest homesteaders exchange civil words.

Ma Prem made it clear that she and the others have no intention of merely socializing with the "outside" or of forcing their beliefs on others. "Proselytizers are just insecure," she added. The Rajneeshees see their mission as one of change, and if it hurts others to change, so be it. Said she, "If Jesus or Buddha had surrendered to the mentality of the masses, there would not have been the changes made. That would have kept the dream alive, perpetuated the nonsense. Instead, we can be responsible and wake them up by our being. We won't surrender, so in that sense there are definite dichotomies." Adversity is breeding strengths on both sides.

A New Religion: Rajneeshism may be the newest religion on the planet, but it is not the smallest. With a membership of 300,000, it has more members than Zoroastrianism, far more than Mohammed had when he started Islam (only 50

families), and it is 1/6th the size of Jainism (with 2 million adherents), the religion Rajneesh abdicated to start his own. Hindus reject Rajneesh. India's devout Hindu leader and former Prime Minister Morarji Desai called him a "sexual pervert." Asiaweek noted that Indians "object to his calling his followers sannyasins, which they contend refers to only the most enlightened and holy of religious seekers." For Hindus the term sannyasin is highly respected, for it is the name of Hindu monks who renounce the world of illusions, of name and fame, and seek god wholly and single-mindedly under vows which include chastity and simplicity. Rajneesh's use of the term neo-Sannyas is considered a travesty, even if one thanks him for the qualifying neo prefix. Most non-Hindus will simply never understand and will forever confuse his neo-Sannyasins with the real thing. Rajneesh himself has written in one of his 350 books, *Journey Toward the Heart*, "If you ask Hindus, Hindus will say, 'This man [Rajneesh] is a Jain, and trying to sabotage Hinduism from within...This is what the Shankaracharya of Puri [a highly respected Hindu holy man] says about me: 'Beware of this man! He is not a Hindu.'"

David Sherman, 37-year old religious scholar living in Oregon, was a delegate at the World Hindu Organization conferences in Sri Lanka and Kathmandu last year. He observes that Indians who attended worried aloud that Westerners might take Rajneeshism as the standard Indian religion. He told Asiaweek that some orthodox Hindus view Rajneesh as a "dime-a-dozen mesmeriser" whose success in the West is due to his spell-binding discourses, pop- psychology and promotion of self-gratification. "He is like a Big Daddy saying it's OK to do whatever you want, whatever feels good," says Sherman, "and Westerners obviously like that." Indeed, Rajneesh does tell his devotees to "Rejoice, celebrate, indulge and you will come to the other side of it. The way to is through... Perversity is caused by repression. Where you place your taboos is where your infatuation lies." Despite all of this, Ma Prem Sunshine believes that Rajneesh himself is a celibate at this stage of his life, "not because he thinks he should be, but because it is there, because he has transcended." He is also a vegetarian, she noted.

"Good riddance," said the former mayor of Poona, a Hindu named Sri Ramachandra P. Wadke, who admitted being appalled by the "primitive and obscene" behavior of the Rajneeshees in his town.

Toward a theology: The theology of Rajneeshism is understandably undefined. After all, the religion is still only a couple of years old. "We don't teach a dogma," is the response to serious question of doctrine. In fact, members show a definite reluctance or inability to discuss philosophical matters. They're just not interested. Their concerns are the work, the mission. "Work is worship" is their creed. The

workplace, whether it be field or kitchen, is called the "temple." Unlike many other similar groups, the Rajneeshees do not meditate, except four times a year when they gather en masse to sit in silence with their teacher. There are no daily meditations, no interior practices, no yogas, no formal worship or devotions. For these men and women, life itself is sufficient, and finding meaning in the moment, in the work, in the experiences of the day is their discipline. If that sounds a bit existential, Rajneesh agrees, describing himself as "an existential neo-sannyasin." If it sounds a little mundane or this-worldly, remember that Rajneeshism is "material spiritualism," with a lot of emphasis, at least on the lower reaches of the path, on the material side of things, not the mystical or transcendent.

Technically speaking, scholars view Rajneeshism as a form of pantheism. He is a strict monist who disavows the laws of karma and the existence of God as Creator or Lord. Professor Clarke has capsulated Rajneeshism's view of God thus: "All reality is a single, divine essence. God is not a thing among other things. God is existence as such. God is eternal, dynamic creativity." Most Hindus would laud this monistic bent, holding that monism is the highest of all spiritual perceptions. But most would also disagree with Rajneesh that God is only immanent and not also transcendent. While the Western religions (Christian/Judaic/Islamic) believe God is purely transcendent, eternally separate from the imperfect world which He created (dualistic theism), Rajneesh takes the opposite view of God as strictly immanent, the essential Being of the world itself and of all men (pantheism). It is the considered view of many who are deeply involved in the theological issues that, taken separately, dualistic theism (such as Christianity and Judaism) and monistic pantheism (such as Rajneeshism) are flawed, are only part of a whole which embraces and includes them both. Ancient Hindu rishis and siddhas would join modern philosophers in urging that God is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and created, relative and Absolute. This synthesis reconciles the East with the West, dualism with monism. It is a "di-polar" vision of God which is termed panentheism, meaning "all-in-God." It is not Rajneesh's view, however.

Rajneesh believes that real spiritual progress is reserved for the wealthy, or at least is not a luxury that the poor can afford. That opens Rajneeshism to the criticism of being "elitist," and observers note the tendency of followers to be highly educated, well-to-do successful men and women. Rajneesh also believes that religions other than his own stifle and constrict man, especially when they are dogmatic and bound in senseless superstition or uninformed by awakened minds. Few who have contemplated the extremes of religious fanaticism would plaid the extremes of religious fanaticism would argue the point, but there may be more awakened minds and hearts out there in God's playground than Rajneesh in all his wisdom is conscious of. Great, evolved souls are born into all the world's faiths from time to time. By his reckoning, the only fully illumined men on the planet

today are himself and fellow spiritual renegade Krishnamurthi - proof positive of the narrow propensities of the mind, apparently even the awakened mind. To be generous on this point, some observers have offered that he says many things that he doesn't fully hold to be true.

Neo-Tantrism: The unabashed sexuality of the Rajneeshees is a very real threat to most people, whether they are the village folks of India or the country folks of Oregon. The Rajneeshees are aware of this, but see it as the other fellow's hang-up. They are very upfront on this: "We don't do anything here that people don't do everywhere else. Only we aren't ashamed. We don't hide it." They have a nudist camp at Rancho Rajneesh, where commune school children and visitors are bussed in each day to join the faithful in Nature Park. To Oregonians, that doesn't look or sound much like religion. Jainism, which Rajneesh rejected, is fairly strict on sexual matters and very strong on asceticism. Naturally, some people have suggested that Rajneesh is just rebelling, getting rid of his own Freudian hang-ups by creating a religion which permits all that was denied him in those tender, formative years. Who knows?

Tantrism is a magical, mystical Hindu path with diverse and important orthodox teachings. Only the so-called "left-handed" Tantrism, a small, divergent sect, [advocates orgiastic excesses] considered heterodox by nearly all Hindus. There is in left-handed Tantrism a doctrine of using the mind to transcend the mind, described sometimes as cleaning a sooty pot with mud. Thus, it is taught that sex can be used to get rid of the sexual fetters, that food and drink can be indulged in even to excess, for excesses will show the folly of it all faster than repressive controls. Tantrism is just the opposite of orthodox Hinduism, which places great importance on virtue, moderation and self-control. Tantrism rejects tradition, pooh-poohs disciplines of yoga and asceticism (including celibacy) and scoffs at ideals of renunciation. Genuine Tantrics, most of whom are in the Sakta religion, are rare in India today, apart from a few practitioners in the North. There seem to be far more in America, and Rajneesh is not the only proponent. Whether such an antinomian, intensely indulgent behavior will be permitted in the West remains to be seen. Remember the Mormon's early struggle with polygamy? But that Rajneeshism is indeed a form of neo-Tantrism (mixed in with an eclectic gathering from a dozen other ways and paths from Zen to Sufism to Taoism) is clear to Professor Clarke who asserts: "Tantrism, in my judgement, constitutes the regulating principles in his teachings and meditative practices." The professor sees Rajneeshism as the founder's attempts to "synthesize Tantric tradition with a Freudian or humanistic and wholistic psychology...playing down the ritual to make it more marketable in the West." From other research done at Oregon's universities, Professor Clarke concludes, "I see Rajneeshism growing out of the human potential movement of the 60's, but as a kind of transcendental validation

of that movement. those who were in all the group encounters have sought some transcendent reference and find it in Rajneesh who is very familiar with Western terminology and they can resonate with him."

**Survival of the Fittest:** Like all utopian experiments, Rajneeshism's future is tenuous. First of all, Rajneesh is said to be the only enlightened being in the group and is a man of such undeniable charisma that he will be a hard act to follow. Asked by *The New Saivite World* to define the crucial issue of survival (given the dozens of communes, TM Movements, Guru Maharajis, etc. that have come and gone across the American experience), Professor Clarke offered two: 1. The ability of the Rajneeshees to attain some form of accommodation with the outside world and 2. The crisis of succession. To the first, it was noted that the group is on a collision course with just about everybody around, and members do not appear inclined to change their antagonizing ways. To the second, it was noted that there are real internal conflicts within the organization. On the one hand, the strong and notorious Ma Anand Sheela has been endowed with most of the administrative, political powers and functions, which means the control of corporations worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Rajneesh speaks daily with her about the affairs of the commune (His silence is not total; speech is limited to a few.). The spiritual mantle has apparently fallen to a man: American Swami Anand Theerta, 56. How the two work things out after the master "leaves his body" will be an important rite of passage for Rajneeshism.

But the Rajneeshees say they are not concerned about the future. The founder of their deeply mystical faith has, through them, successfully brought much of the wisdom of the orient to America. He is living a simple, mostly silent life, swimming twice daily and taking his afternoon Darshan Drive along dirt roads. He is healthier these days, it is said. The disciples are high on their work, consummate karma yogis, content to live in the moment while they plan for the June 1-July 18, 1984, Third International World Celebration. And neither is a neighbor and native Oregon farmer much worried. He can philosophize, too: "I don't concern myself much. I just wait and see. If a late winter don't get'em, then an early spring thaw just might."

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