

A Seam for the Master

This book by Veena is now out of print so, as there may be people who would like to read it, here is a slightly abridged version, as offered by [Osho Meditations in the UK](#).

A Seam for the Master tells the story of how Veena came to design and sew the outfits for Osho's photo sessions and how she found a clever solution for his 'pre-secured' sleeping garment.

Chapter 3

The Orange Issue

I have written elsewhere about my momentous meeting with Osho, taking sannyas and wearing orange clothes, but then I didn't go into the issue of orange.

To become a sannyasin (the closest translation in western terms would be 'disciple') Osho asked for two commitments: to change one's name and to wear orange. His explanation for this request was that to undergo the process of transformation of the self needed a strong determination to change and considerable hard work and dedication. If the individual was not willing even to change his name and the colour of his clothes – two very superficial outer changes – he was not ready to make the very arduous inner changes necessary to progress on the path. These changes were, then, an indication that the individual was willing and ready to make a start.

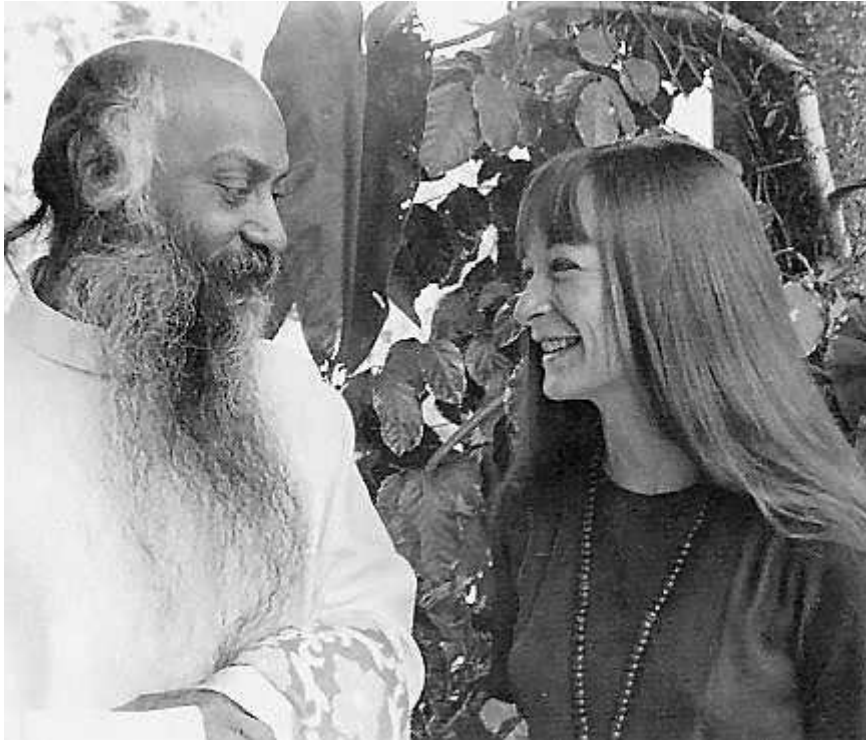
Our names are imbued with conditioning. They are part of our identity, part of our family connections, part of our personal history. Changing our name means making a break with this conditioning, taking a first step toward breaking down the centuries of conditioning we carry which imprisons us and prevents us from being free to be our real selves.

The colour orange is significant in a number of ways. Firstly it is the traditional colour of the Hindu sannyasin – for no better reason than it was easy to disguise the dinginess of white clothes by rinsing them in river water – the brown-orange colour of which adhered to the cloth! Osho got more lyrical by associating the colour with the sunrise, with the dawn. He talked often of his sannyasins being the heralds of a new dawn in the life of mankind, a new beginning free of the crushing weight of the conditionings of civilisation. He said also that it was a joyous lively colour and a great number of people wearing shades of orange had the psychological effect of raising the spirits and imparting great joy to all concerned.

Great aspirations and very inspiring, but to someone with such a fashion-conscious and colour-conscious ego as myself, orange was a huge no-no, and the prospect of having to wear only this colour all the time was a considerable hurdle to overcome!! Name changes and dynamic meditation were no problem, but orange?

Well, I swallowed my objections and in a khadi shop in Bombay obediently bought some kurtas and cotton 'pyjama' pants which I had dyed. Exploring the fabric shops with their rainbow arrays of cotton to make matching saree tops I found a more subtle pink-orange fabric, a kind of peach colour. I got a sample and took it back to Osho to ask if this was a permissible shade to wear. He was a bit reluctant – he was after a full-on, in-your-face effect – but finally agreed and I felt a bit happier wearing this colour.

Bombay was an uncomfortable place to be in – dirty, hot, and very humid. I spent a lot of time just hanging out in Woodlands – the rather up-market apartment block in which Osho lived – and meeting the sannyasins who came in and out. Most were Indians but there were a few Westerners. The person who became my closest friend was a reserved, exquisite-looking English woman, Nirvano.



Osho and Nirvano

One day Osho called Nirvano and me into his room and told us that soon he would be holding a meditation camp in Mt Abu, a hill station on the borders of Gujarat and Rajasthan. For some reason he wanted us to go up there ahead of time and suggested we leave the next day. We were rather taken aback but, OK, whatever. The train tickets had already been procured for us so the next day we found ourselves on a journey through the dusty Gujarat desert. We arrived in Mt Abu late in the afternoon and set off to find the dharmasala (a kind of 'guest house' for pilgrims attached to a temple) in which we were supposedly to stay.

The place was disgusting!! A Jaina monk led us to a cave-like room which was filthy dirty and STANK. Looking out of the makeshift window I saw an open drain with sewage flowing sluggishly past. There was no way we were going to stay here, and I fortunately already had an idea. On the way into the town I had seen a sign labelled 'Dak Bungalow' and I knew from my guidebook that it was often possible to rent such a place. Officials of the British Raj had built dak bungalows, which were 2- or 3-roomed houses, all over India so that when they travelled round the country on official business they were sure of cool, clean, comfortable places to stay.

I nudged Nirvano out of the door and we hurriedly left the dharmasala. We were pretty tired by this time but we trudged up a small hill – and found paradise! The dak bungalow turned out to be a lovely small dwelling in a garden of roses, some trees and a LAWN! A little bedraggled but definitely an attempt at an English lawn! A curious Indian servant came out to greet us and when he understood we were interested in staying there, happily showed us inside. The inside was even better! An absolutely huge room with the regulation high ceiling, a bathroom and a kitchen – all spotlessly clean and all for the fantastic sum of 2 rupees each (about 30p). We were ecstatic. The one remaining problem was to find some food but the man had ideas about that too. He spoke some English, I had a smattering of Hindi from my guidebook, and with the addition of expressive hand gestures it was arranged that he would prepare an evening meal for us for another 2 rupees. An hour later a passable feast appeared and we finally went to bed still rather disbelieving in our fortunate discovery.

Then followed beautiful days. Mt Abu was a magical place and each hour brought new delights, not the least of which was the 'carrot halva' which we ate in copious amounts. Carrot halva was a sweet made of grated carrots boiled to solidity in milk and sugar with added pistachio nuts.

But by the third day rebellion was stirring in the female ranks. We were both dressed in our orange gear, me in an unflattering khadi kurta and lungi and Nirvano in what she called her 'straightjacket' an even more unflattering garment, straight and shapeless and uncomfortable.

There was a shop which we studiously avoided – metaphorically crossing to the other side – because it was filled with glorious bolts of fabric in a thousand different patterns and colours. The Rajasthani women dress differently to women in the rest of India. Rather than sarees, they wear incredibly full skirts cut in two circles so there is a phenomenal amount of material at the bottom of the skirt. They then wear tiny backless tops and a thin, shawl-like covering which they drape over their heads and shoulders. The fullness of the skirts causes them to walk with a gloriously sexy feminine sway. We felt clumsy and ungainly and very unattractive next to them!

Before too long our footsteps first halted at the beckoning shop and finally crossed the threshold. My dressmaker's eyes were dazzled at the vast potential in front of me. Femininity battled with spirituality and at length we arrived at a kind of compromise: we would get some cloth in shades of the orange spectrum while creating something more sexy and fun to wear. A piece of fabric in swirls of orange, red and yellow with touches of green was without doubt our first choice and I quickly calculated how much material it would take to make a VERY full skirt. The next task was to find a sewing machine. At that time there were very few ready-made clothes and tailors abounded on every street corner, so I managed to bribe one into letting me use his sewing machine for the afternoon. It was an old treadle machine the likes of which I had never used before so it took me some time to get the hang of it, but soon I had the necessary rhythm going and I managed to make us each a very full, tiered skirt by nightfall. Of course the tailor rose to fame in a very short time as we became the entertainment offering for the day and were surrounded continuously by a crowd of interested spectators watching these two strange foreigners and their antics. It must be remembered that this was a time before mass tourism, and the British Raj was a thing of the past, so the locals had most probably never seen a westerner before, especially not two young girls sewing in the street!

So successful were my creations – which we teamed with gorgeous patterned T-shirts from the one tourist shop – that we decided to go in for seconds. This time colour swayed our choices and Nirvano went for a beautiful dusky grey-blue colour and I chose a light turquoise. Again the sewing machine was commissioned and the locals enjoyed the show.

We added silver ankle bracelets and colourful Indian bangles to complete the new outfits.

Reckoning was, of course, to come. After ten days Osho, his entourage, and hundreds of Indian sannyasins arrived for the meditation camp. Nirvano bravely made the first step by wearing the orange coloured skirt. Retribution was swift!!! We were called to face the Master with our pretty clothes and told in no uncertain terms that plain orange was the colour and plain fashions were the order of the day. The twentieth century Master had new and different roles to play with his twentieth century western disciples!

But I know I detected a twitching of the lips behind the beard and a twinkle in the eye as we left the room.

What I didn't realise was that a seed had been sown and that a few years later in Poona, when a seamstress was needed, my skills would be remembered and I would be given the ultimate job – the Master's tailor.

Chapter 4

The First Step on the Tailor's Path

Fast-forward to Poona, 1975. After building and living in a bamboo hut – the prototype for many bamboo huts to come – on Krishna House roof, my partner, Naresh, and I relocated to the newly-created Francis House where we had a cute room complete with toilet and bathroom. To make curtains required a sewing machine. I managed to rent an ancient Singer, driven by hand, for 20 rupees a month from a shop in Laxmi Road. Although it was brand new, the design was at least 50 years old and seemed like an antique to me! Sannyas fashion was now flourishing – the kurtas and lungis were a thing of the past. Now people sported a huge variety of styles and colours – except for Nirvano, who continued to wear her 'straightjackets'.

Slowly, though, I noticed, she started to appear in other gear – copious, shapeless garments which made me wonder if she was pregnant! One day she summoned me to Lao Tzu House to look at a dress she had just got back from a Mahatma Gandhi Road tailor (those of us around at that time can tell many a story of MG Road tailors!). It was predictably a mess and she asked if I could make it fit. It was an awful dress and she deserved much better so I said I would rather make her a new dress than spend time trying to alter this one. I think she was so frustrated that, in an unguarded moment, she said yes!

Candida, a wonderfully creative Spanish sannyasin, had developed a very attractive style and I decided to use this for Nirvano's dress. I took all her measurements, bought the fabric, made it up and then tried it on to fit. She looked absolutely beautiful – finally a garment to enhance her delicate beauty. But when she saw herself in the mirror she hurriedly started to take the dress off, saying 'No, no, I can't wear this!' I was shocked. Why not? She told me it was too beautiful and it took me a while to get out of her that she felt it would detract from Osho and she didn't want to draw attention to herself. She wanted always to be in the background.

Hmmmmnn. Well, knowing Osho and his oft-quoted saying that 'Beauty is next to godliness' (not cleanliness), I suggested that she go and show him the dress and see if he approved or not. I realised the big decision would have to come from him. Off she went and I waited in trepidation. Had I stuck my neck out too far yet one more time? Finally she appeared – with a big grin on her face.

'Well?' I said.

'He said I look like an angel,' she smiled.

'I guess that means yes,' I said and hugged her. From that day on I made most of her clothes.

Again 'retribution' from the top was swift to follow! About a week later I was peacefully sipping a cup of tea when Priya appeared at my door.

'Come quickly! Come quickly!' she breathed.

I followed her at a trot to Lao Tzu House to find Nirvano rather white-faced. She told me that Osho had suddenly decided that morning to have a photo session and wanted me to make something for him to wear – by 11 o'clock. I glanced at the kitchen clock. It was ten to nine! My god! I had never made anything for him before and now he was giving me two hours to concoct something? My face must have been pretty white too as I followed Priya and Nirvano to the verandah outside the library where there was a cupboard with some cloth and an old sewing machine.

After Osho had arrived in Poona a sannyasin woman had sewn for him for a while before returning to the west. It was she who had created the maternity-looking outfits for Nirvano. There were a few bits of uninspiring cloth on the shelf which I fingered in some dismay. Nirvano told me that Osho had said I was to make a kind of cloak with a hood – very simple! No doubt! But I had no idea of his size and I had by now less than two hours to come up with something! Osho wasn't very tall, actually about the same height as myself, so Nirvano suggested I just use my own self as a model.

With a forehead bathed in sweat not just from the heat, I cleared a table in the library and started cutting. Priya obligingly found me a mirror and I set to work. That was probably the most focussed I have ever been in my life! Summoning all my powers of concentration and all my sewing skills I actually did manage to produce something by 11 o'clock. Nirvano whipped it out of my hands and ran onto Osho's balcony where he and the photographers were waiting.

Totally exhausted I went back to my room and made another cup of tea to sip. I was just beginning to relax and gather my scattered wits together, when Priya appeared. Again it was, 'Come quickly! Come quickly!'

'Oh my god, what now?' I thought as I hurried back to the house after her. In the kitchen Nirvano this time had a cheeky grin on her face – which I was soon to learn heralded a new and impossible task for me. With a wicked giggle she told me that he had liked the hood so much that he wanted me to make another one for another photo session at three that afternoon, after his nap.

'Whaaaaat?' I had already scraped the bottom of the fabric barrel but it seemed I had to conjure up something else. The positive side was that I had three instead of two hours to do it in! There was no piece of fabric big enough to make a single garment from, but I played around with a bit of velvet and a bit of satin and saw that if I made the cloak from the velvet and gave the hood a wide border of satin, I could just manage. That went in just before 3 pm and this time I staggered home totally wiped out. I most certainly was not satisfied with my efforts but he seemed quite happy, so what to do. I just hoped that he would give me a bit of warning next time so I could get some interesting fabric and have the time to create something better.

He did! I was told well in advance when the next photo session would be and, as this looked like it was going to be something that might happen more often, I took care to stock up on some fabrics and to even dream up some ideas. In hindsight I think that the haste of the first session was a kind of test for me to see if I could knuckle down and come up with something with the odds stacked pretty much against me. As our spiritual journeys continued he was to create many similar 'devices' to help his sannyasins to push through boundaries, find strengths they never knew they had, face and overcome hurdles they never thought they could surmount and generally trust in the ego-quashing process necessary for the traveller on the path.

The photo sessions were to be an ongoing event right up to when Osho was too weak from his final illness to sit for them. Many people have asked me why he was so keen on 'dressing up'. Many thought it rather idiotic. My response is perhaps fourfold. Firstly, Osho genuinely loved fabric. His father had been a cloth merchant and Osho had been brought up surrounded by the colours and textures of the fabric in the shop. Anyone who has been to India knows that buying cloth is a very creative, even sensuous, process. You take your shoes off, sit down on a clean padded surface, select bolts of fabric from the shelves and an assistant unfurls them in front of you until you are almost drowning in a sea of fabric. Merits of weave, colour, texture and pattern are earnestly discussed and at least two cups of tea or a cold drink must be consumed before a final decision is made. Buying is an artistic and social occasion, not merely a business transaction. Osho was especially fascinated when cloth started to come in from around the world. He would often ask for piles to be brought into his room so he could touch the fabric and choose pieces for various robes and photo sessions.

Secondly, I think it was all part of the Master/Disciple process. The master looks at his disciple, sees what his particular talents are – be it sewing, photography, fashion, book design, music, acting, craftsmanship, gardening, martial arts, jewellery making, psychology, law, finance, whatever – and creates situations in which the disciple can both blossom and also learn some hard lessons not taught in a regular school. The master starts where the disciple is and then guides him further... and further... and further...

Thirdly, Osho had an incredible flair for the dramatic and unexpected. He loved to keep us guessing! This was so much part of his character and charm. He was able to make each second of each day full of interest and excitement. He truly did live each moment to the fullest and wanted us

to do so as well. Who wants boredom?

So, if there was to be a photograph on the cover of a book, why go for the same old portrait over and over? Why not appear as a Zen calligrapher, a musician, a chess player, a sultan, a sheikh? If there are sannyasins who can sew, take photos, design books, so why not use their talents, be creative and have fun? As an attention-getting device it was also brilliant! When one considers how many thousands of seekers from all over the world were captivated by him and his 'teachings', his ability to sustain the interest and love of so many diverse human beings was a pretty awesome feat.

In fact the guise he was shown in was not, in the end, important. What seemed to be important was his face on the cover of each book. Over and over and over again sannyasins were to say that their very first experience of Osho was seeing his face on a book on a shelf in a bookshop. For many this seemed to be an experience of recognition or knowing and it was that book, which they invariably bought, that set them on the path to his presence.

And fourthly, in his own words:

"There are people who want everything clean, clear-cut, logical, so that their mind can figure out what it is. This is an illogical place, irrational, absurd.

You come with your certain ideas and when those ideas are not fulfilled, you feel baffled, you feel angry, offended. This whole place is being created in such a way that it offends many people, because that is my way to screen those people out. Somebody comes in the gate and, seeing a marble gate, he escapes. So good, so kind of him! Because he had come to see an Indian kind of ashram, not a marble gate, his ideas are shattered. He wanted to see people living in poverty, in a kind of spiritual dirtiness. He wanted to see people almost starved, fasting. The marble gate is put there to put these people off. I don't want them inside.

Small things offend people and they don't see how small things become barriers. Arup's mother, Gita, has written a question: she wants her family to become more interested in me, but the only thing that seems to create trouble is my pictures with fantastic hats. That is creating the trouble. So....good! Now bring more hats for me, because these are the people I would not like to be here. I would not like them to be here because such stupid minds have to be kept out. These minds cannot grow."

The first two 'hat' efforts made in Poona 1:



Life went on. I continued to edit his books while occasionally acting as wardrobe mistress. He had said I could work in Lao Tzu whenever I felt like it and as the weather got hotter I spent more and more time in the house, on the verandah, because it was much cooler than my room.

One day Priya appeared with a white garment in her hand, got out the old sewing machine and proceeded to try to sew something, cursing softly under her breath. As she really appeared to be

struggling I lent over and offered to help. Sticking my nose in as usual. She was trying to fix the elastic on his sleeping garment. He liked the traditional lungi that Indians like to wear, but, as he explained many times, he was a 'lazy' man! So, instead of tying the lungi each time, he wanted it pre-secured, with elastic around the top so he could easily get into it!

For me it was quite obvious that the system currently employed was not very effective so after a moment or two I suggested an alternative way of doing things. Priya was never a woman for words so after a few minutes she silently disappeared and came back with Nirvano who asked me to explain my idea. She then said I should make a sample by the afternoon and left. As I had something to copy this wasn't a very difficult task and I actually had time to give it to our laundress to launder. To ensure the highest standards of cleanliness and hygiene we had a policy of washing everything before it went into his room for him to wear.

Events were gaining momentum. He liked my innovation and I was commissioned to make three more lungis for sleeping in. Then I went back to editing.

Chapter 5

The Curtains

I was now to work full time as a tailor. As no one had been sewing for quite some time there was a lot of catching up to do. My first task was to make more robes, and my first problem was that there was no more of the material he liked.

Many people asked me why Osho preferred synthetic fabric to natural fibres. Just past the hippie era, we were, at that time, into all things natural. He never really said but I assume two things. He always liked to look immaculate. This was very much part of his Zen character. Natural fibres crease and in hot humid Indian weather any garment made from them looks like a limp rag in no time at all. The second reason is very much my idea. I noticed when I was handling anything that came out of his room that it would be filled with his energy. I don't think this was imagination; many people felt the same. But it seemed to me that anything made of a synthetic fabric retained the energy more than something made from a natural fibre. The white robes, after being worn a few times, felt INCREDIBLE to the touch - so soft, so silky, so LIGHT, it was almost as if you were holding nothing at all. And they seemed to transmit a glowing, blissful energy, which was passed on to the person holding them. This is hard to put into words.

In a discourse he mentioned once that Zen masters traditionally gave their garments to their disciples as a means of passing on something of their very being. Osho certainly went down this road, as many sannyasins who received robes and hats as gifts know very well. As fast as we made the robes, he gave them away! This kept me, and later the other sannyasins who joined the sewing room, in full time employment!

Perhaps this, then is the answer to the 'synthetic fabric' question.

Things were not, however, that simple, as I was soon to find out. There were only special kinds of synthetic fabric that suited him. And they were not easy to get. He explained, through Nirvano, that the fabric he liked had to have a very loose weave which thus allowed the body to 'breathe'.

Holding a piece of fabric up to the light, I could see how tightly or loosely woven it was. I always bought the latter one but even that wasn't always successful. And the only way to know was to make the robe up and for him to wear it on a test run. As soon as I found one that suited I went out and bought every piece of that fabric in the shop! We often had sannyasins in other parts of India tracking down the same cloth in other fabric shops when I couldn't get it any more in Poona or Bombay! Well, it meant that lots of people got gifts!

From the very beginning I wasn't happy with the cut of the sleeves but, as Nirvano had said to make the robe EXACTLY like the sample one, I did. Soon, however, I carefully suggested that I could make improvements. The sleeve had too much fabric near the shoulder and it almost looked like he had little girl 'puff' sleeves. I wanted to make things more streamlined. Nirvano became very fierce - she could be a very tough Zen Master especially when Osho was concerned. She adamantly said no. I think she was afraid that he would lose some freedom of movement if the sleeves were too tight. I didn't think so. If they were well cut, they would be fine. And one thing I did know how to do was to cut.

So, one day, against all orders, I secretly made up a new robe with sleeves in this new, improved style. Task accomplished, and risking Nirvano's wrath, I showed it to her. She could see that it looked better but she was predictably annoyed that I had taken it upon myself to make changes. At my urging, however, she did reluctantly take it in to be tried on. I waited anxiously! Finally I heard the door open and close, braced myself for whatever - and a dozen robes descended on top of me! I mentioned before that the robes seemed full of energy and to be deluged with a dozen of them was to receive quite a blast! Both exasperated and laughing, Nirvano said I was to take the sleeves out of all the current robes, re-cut them and re-insert them - by the end of tomorrow! Damn, why I couldn't I ever leave well enough alone. I worked right through the night, through discourse the next morning and didn't stop till late in the evening, but I got them all done. AND he wore the new improved version immediately for that morning discourse - ironed but not washed!

A few days later he sent me the most beautiful of gifts. A Japanese sannyasin had some time previously brought him an exquisitely crafted Japanese tea ceremony kit. I think he still liked his English-style cup of tea, so he gave me the box filled with the beautiful bowls and things for a Japanese tea ceremony. With my love for Zen and all things Japanese, this was a really special gift. One late afternoon Priya, who usually helped in the kitchen, appeared silently next to my sewing table and told me to go home, have a shower and be ready in the library in fifteen minutes, and to bring a tape measure with me. Wow! This was a new one. A little nervous, I did as instructed and finally Nirvano appeared in the door of the library and beckoned me to come with her. I followed her to the doors leading to Osho's and her rooms. Osho and Nirvano each had a room, balcony and bathroom connected by a passage, the door of which was guarded 24 hours around the clock by a 'samurai' (sannyasins whose training in martial arts was part of their path).

I started to tremble as she lead the way to Osho's room and opened the door and gestured to me to enter, again one of those devilish grins flitting lightly across her face.

The shock was enormous. Firstly I was almost knocked flat by the wave of energy hitting me - I know my knees buckled. I had already had many experiences of the energy field surrounding an enlightened master, but never as concentrated as this. With nowhere to be dissipated, the energy just builds up inside the room and to someone not used to such a force, the impact is enormous.

Once I had pulled myself together and could take a breath I registered that Osho was not in the room and that the room itself was a nightmare! The walls were made of sections of patterned pink marble (I hate pink as decor) with the slabs separated by bilious green strips of tile which culminated in a kind of Islamic arch over each slab. The remaining wall and ceiling was patterned with pink and yellow stucco - the colour of vomit, if you have just eaten or drunk something red. Two imitation chandeliers completed the Liberace effect. Knowing my interior design sensibilities, Nirvano giggled and gestured to me to sit down near the window.

'Awful, isn't it?' she said and went on to whisper that her biggest freak-out ever had been when she had been shown the room which Osho was to occupy - one hundred percent Bollywood decor! Neither she nor he had had any say in the decoration - it had been prepared for him while he was still in Bombay.

I knew enough of Osho's routine to know this was his bath-time before eating and the evening darshan, and I could hear him splashing about in the bath. Astha was doing a quick clean and Nirvano, while talking to me, was idly picking up and folding the newspaper which was scattered all over the floor. Some pens and some paper were on a little table next to his chair and all of a sudden I was flooded with an existential experience of enormous ordinariness. In his discourses Osho had often said he was just an ordinary man, but there was no way I could conceive of this. To me he was the most extraordinary being on the planet, how could he be ordinary. Yet, here I was experiencing just such a state. I felt almost faint with the impact.

Nirvano sat waiting patiently, understanding, I knew, exactly what I was going through. She must have been through experiences like this many times. She gestured to me to sit down with her on the marble floor and, when I again managed to pull myself together, she pointed to the window behind me and asked me to take a look. I turned and saw a beautiful big picture window strung with some shabby beige curtains, hems uneven, seams frayed. Because Osho was allergic to such a huge amount of material the curtains were set between two layers of glass, the inner layer in the form of sliding windows so someone could reach in and close and open the curtains. It wasn't that easy to replace them.

'Would you be able to make some new curtains?' she asked. The familiar itch possessed my fingers. This had to change! I of course said yes, although I had never had to curtain a window with such a large expanse before. She was happy at my reply and asked me to take some measurements and do it as soon as possible. Robe-making was to be suspended until the project was finished.

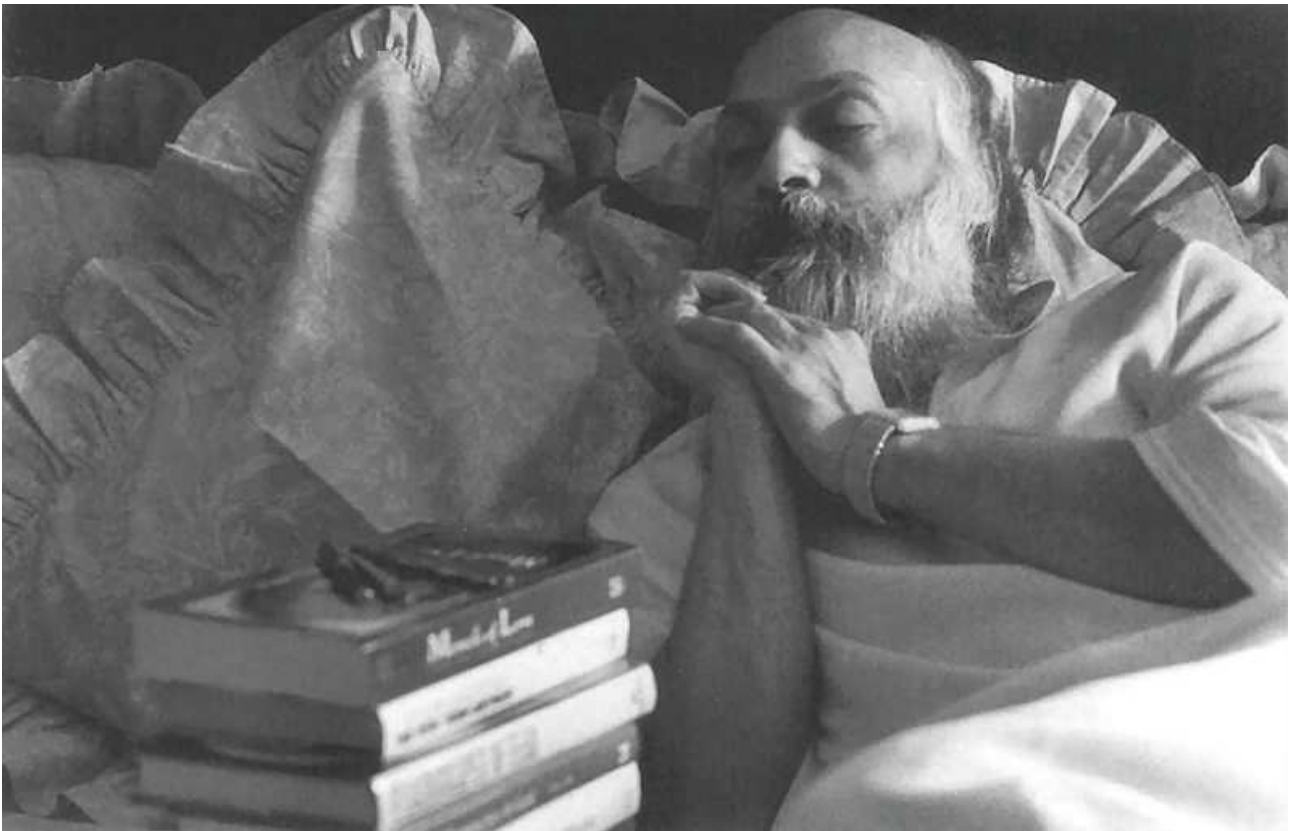
When I left the room I was so out of it that I knew I would not be able to work anymore so I went back to my room and just lay on my bed. Waves of energy flooded over and through me and all the time I was experiencing this sense of 'ordinariness'. I think this was one of the most transforming experiences of my life as a sannyasin and somehow I then knew what he meant by 'ordinariness'

and how a person is never ordinary until the ego goes, because the ego strives perpetually to be extraordinary. It thus was easier to recognise the many times my ego reared its indefatigable head when I felt proud of something I had done or offended at criticisms. Each infinitesimal growth of awareness meant a consequent infinitesimal disappearance of the ego - one further tiny step along the way.

The next day Nirvano and I discussed the kind of fabric we could use. I suggested a neutral, off-white colour to try to counteract the ghastly pink and green of the rest of the room, and asked about using raw silk. We couldn't wash raw silk but if we hung it outside for a few days (one of our common practices) the smell of new fabric would go and the glass would in any case stop any smell still lingering from affecting Osho. Off I went to Bombay to one of the glorious silk Emporiums and found a beautifully sumptuous piece of fabric which I thought would be perfect. I bought a small piece as a sample and took it back to Poona to show Osho and Nirvano. They both liked it, the fabric was bought and I set about making the curtains. In Poona 2 we had a big sewing table for tasks such as this, but in the early days I had to use the library floor which involved huge cleaning routines. The curtains did look good and improved the room enormously.

Chapter 6

And the Blankets...



One morning the samurai who was guarding Osho's door suddenly appeared in the library. This was very unusual as the samurai's NEVER left their post. He asked us to quickly call Astha and Shiva. Shiva, as well as being the boss samurai was a chiropractor by trade. Surprised, we did as asked and as no further explanation was forthcoming we went back to work, curiosity unsatisfied.

Later in the afternoon, Nirvano materialised at my side. She had such an aura of silence surrounding her and moved so quietly that you never knew she was around until she spoke or entered your field of vision. She sat down a little gingerly and told me that when she was setting out Osho's blankets for his nap she had put her back out. Hence the call for Shiva who was able to 'click' her spine into place again. She asked me if there was anything I could do about the blankets. As I had no idea what the situation was, she explained that the only blankets Osho was comfortable with were cotton khadi blankets that he had been carrying around for years (a bit like Peanuts!). There were about 11 of them, nearly all different, and he liked to use them in a certain combination which necessitated her spreading them over the bed twice a day (for his midday nap and at night). The constant movement had finally put her back out.

She wondered if I could somehow put them together in a way that they could easily be undone again for washing. Obviously a solid mass could neither be washed nor dried easily. It was a little difficult for me to visualise what was needed so the next afternoon, when Laxmi was in with him doing Ashram business (she saw him twice a day, in the afternoon and after darshan; incidentally, if a sannyasin had written a letter to him with a question, this is when he read and answered it) Nirvano brought the blankets out for me to have a look. They were rather tatty with frayed edges and a few holes, but this, apparently, was what suited him. I thought a bit and then suggested that I make a wide border of satin-cotton on the biggest blankets and insert the others inside, held with

some large tacking stitches which could be fairly quickly undone for laundering and then secured again. The border would be sewn by machine onto one blanket and hand-hemmed onto the other. Two of these blanket combos had to be made so that he could use one while the other was being laundered, because it wouldn't be easy to get them dry quickly, especially in monsoon time.

Rather laborious, but it would work... except there was a problem! With Osho there was ALWAYS a problem! The problem was that it was essential for the combination of blankets to be a certain weight. It seemed then, that I would have to weigh them and try to put the 11 pieces together in order to make each blanket combo the same weight. This would not be easy as the blankets were all different sizes, different thicknesses and made of different fibres!

How could I weigh such a big mass of fabric?! It took me a day or two to come up with something but, shopping down MG Road two mornings later, I suddenly had a brainwave. I told the rickshaw to take me to a nice bakery I had been to on occasion. Was my memory correct? Had I seen a large scale there for weighing out large quantities of flour? Yes, there it was. I thought it would do the job admirably. The owner of the shop thought otherwise. He was shocked! Oh no, this scale was in constant use. No way could he spare it for a few days. My pleadings were to no avail so quickly I turned to the non-verbal argument - I put two one-hundred rupee notes on the counter. The protestations paused for a brief second but quickly continued. Fortunately, I had a few more notes in my purse so I put down two more. In the thoughtful silence that followed I suggested that he could maybe weigh out the amounts he needed for an extra day and store them temporarily in a bag or something. The rupees were to compensate him for his trouble. And I swore I would have his scale back in 24 hours. He blustered a bit more but when no more notes were forthcoming he quite quickly decided an arrangement could be made! I arranged to pick up the scale early the next morning!

I was up at the crack of dawn and arrived at the bakery wondering if the plan was going to work. Surprisingly he had actually got things together quite efficiently and had already weighed out his needs for the next day.

I put the scale in the rickshaw and took it back to the ashram. I inveigled Astha, whose eagle eyes detected specks where I saw nothing, into checking my cleaning job. We didn't want his blankets covered in flour! After his nap, the blankets were all brought out. The acceptable combination was weighed and the weight noted. The weight of the other blankets together, however, was very different. What to do? Nirvano decided that perhaps the best thing to do was to try to even out the weights till they were almost the same. That involved considerable juggling into various combinations and we finally arrived at a balance where one was only 300 grams heavier than the other. Three hundred grams is about a handful of sugar and I thought that such a small difference, considering it was spread out over a fairly large area, wouldn't make much difference.

I was wrong. Until the end he never liked that blanket! Said it was too heavy!

This just one more an indication of how incredibly sensitive Osho was and how intricate a task it was to take care of him. I got the feeling that he was never really interested in the body - he had gone way beyond it - and was just trusting to those around him to take care of the physical body, leaving him free to do his real work which was taking care of the spiritual growth of his sannyasins. His sense of smell was acute so anything with an intense smell - from sweaty bodies to fabric to chemicals to flowers - had to be removed. He was allergic to dust so everything around him had to be spotlessly clean and he had diabetes so his food had to be very carefully controlled. He didn't complain but we were well aware of how any small thing could affect his well-being and we of course tried our best to be as careful as possible. Our efforts affected us as well. In the process of taking care of him our own awareness and sensitivities were heightened and, since the end result of the path we had chosen was awareness, working around him, although intense, was a priceless gift!

The other blanket met with total approval so we tried to arrange that the offending blanket would be sparingly used. A blanket-washing day (about once a month) was always a huge occasion for the

person in the laundry and me, and later the other people in the sewing room. We would all arrive at 6 am when the blanket came off the bed and quickly undo it into its separate parts. Then the laundress washed, dried and ironed it. For his midday nap the other blanket would have to be used. As soon as the laundress had the blankets dried and ironed, usually not until late afternoon, sometimes evening, the race would begin to get the parts sewn together again in time for the night's sleep. It was often pretty intense getting it done in time - especially if you pricked your finger and dropped a few drops of blood on the white fabric!! This happened a number of times. We used distilled water, Q-tips and a hairdryer to rectify the problem.

These two blanket combos were carried around the world because, despite a few attempts at change, nothing ever suited him as well as they did.

He must have had those same blankets for 30 years or more! Says much for the quality of khadi products!