

The flame of Osho's vision is catching fire around the world. Ma Prem Lolita reviews a publishing success story.

WHEN YOU THINK about what happened to the teachings of Gautam Buddha and Jesus Christ after they departed from earthly form, Osho's legacy is simply awesome. Buddha's disciples laboriously gathered whatever they could remember of the Tathagata's 40 years of discourses, relying on personal memory. Jesus was even less fortunate: just a few anecdotes were saved, then stretched over four gospels almost identical in content – leaving plenty of space for interpretation, re-interpretation and distortion.

With Osho it's very, very different. For the first time in history, the entire teachings of an enlightened being have been recorded and preserved. Not only that, they are being made available around the world in a style that is worthy of their content. Here is the story of Osho's words, as it is unfolding

First, a little hard copy:

- There has been an eight-fold growth in the sales of Osho's books and tapes since 1990.

- Two and a half million books and tapes of Osho are sold each year.

- Osho is the world's most prolific author, with 600 book titles to his name, 7,000 discourses on audio tape and 1,700 discourses on video tape.

- Translations number 2000 in 43 languages.

- A new title is published every other day of the year.

These achievements arise out of a single source, the original recordings of Osho's words – the "masters of the Master" – which these days are in "deep cold storage," locked away in a high security, environmentally-controlled facility in Europe. Don't ask for the address. You won't get it.

If this seems a little inaccessible for those seeking enlightenment from Osho's words, you can stop worrying – complete digital copies of these archives are scattered across four continents, guaranteeing that, no matter what catastrophes befall humanity there will still be, somewhere, a full

record of everything Osho utters.

The original archive is owned by Osho International Foundation (OIF), Switzerland, and it was this Foundation that in May 1994 took advantage of the digital revolution that was sweeping through the recording world – offering, as it did, an effective means of preserving audio and video tapes that would otherwise, with time, inevitably decay.



**Midtown Manhattan:
Home of Osho International**

The digital re-mastering was done in London, using advanced technology that allowed technicians to upgrade quality, giving Osho's voice clarity, reducing unwanted noise while preserving ambient sounds like birdsong.

As this re-mastering project was being accomplished, sets were purchased by groups of disciples all over the world. "There are now eight copies of the complete digital video archive – we call them archive sets or folders – in circulation on four continents, as well as 12 archive audio sets in English and 14 in Hindi," said Swami Sahajanand, from OIF, one of the disciples overseeing the project.

"The original tapes are stored in a facility used by Hollywood companies like MGM to store their video and film

originals, so we feel that – as far as humanly possible – the preservation and quality control of Osho's original material is safe," he explained.

OPENING THE DOORS

Running parallel with this preservation effort, Osho's disciples sought to deal with another daunting challenge: a commercial book market, which, after Osho's arrest and deportation from the USA in 1985, had effectively slammed the publishing doors on the controversial mystic.

In the beginning, there was only one solution: self-publishing. "Until a few years ago, sannyasins working with Osho's books had a very strong thought form coming out of the 1985 reality – that we had to translate and

publish all of Osho's books ourselves," explained Sahajanand.

In 1989, Rebel Publishing House, established and run by sannyasins, began to produce hardcover editions of Osho's discourses. Simultaneously, a few paperback compilations were produced and soon became such popular sellers in the West that Osho himself suggested they be given to outside publishers, while his hardcover books remained the work of Rebel.

The first major breakthrough came in England. In 1993, when two small but enterprising publishing houses, Element Books and Boxtree, accepted Osho's discourses for commercial production. Element, particularly, was pleased with the ensuing sales and has published eleven Osho books to date.

Two years later, in 1995, the decade-long wall of silence in the USA was finally breached when St. Martin's Press in New York City launched Osho with 100,000 copies of the Osho Zen Tarot. It sold out in two years.

St Martin's followed up with *Meditation: The First and Last Freedom*, a compilation of Osho's meditation techniques first published by Rebel. The results were dramatic, indicating just how effective the commercial market can be with its huge distribution

channels: when Rebel distributed the title in the US market it sold 800 copies a year; St. Martin's sold 10,000 copies in three months.

Now St. Martin's is launching its second book, this time a full discourse series, *The Book of the Secrets*. Many years earlier, back in the Seventies, this series was published by Harper & Row in several volumes and later by Rebel in two volumes titled *Vigyan Bhairav Tantra*. St. Martin's will produce it in one volume: a mammoth-sized 1200-page paperback termed 'bible bound' because of the thin paper used to offset the large number of pages.

Swami Deva Pramod, coordinator of publishing at Osho International New York, commented, "They really like the title. It made sense to them to publish it all in one big book for the sheer perception of it."

"The book has a new subtitle, *The Science of Meditation*, and a design feature known as a 'belly band' – a half height jacket around the book, with Osho's picture on the cover. This is the first time a publisher other than Rebel is printing a cover featuring Osho."

TALKING BOOKS

Meanwhile, with the increasing popularity of multimedia literature, an American audio book company called Audio Renaissance – distributed by St. Martin's – has contracted to produce nine titles of Osho.

Audio Renaissance wanted to do an audio tie-in with *The Book of the Secrets*, but the quality of the audio recordings – some of the first recorded discourses given by Osho in English – is not high enough to meet commercial publishing standards. A creative solution was close at hand, thanks to Osho's prolific output.

"We suggested putting together a few tapes on which Osho speaks about the same issues that are raised in the book," Pramod explained, in a recent interview with *Viba Connection* magazine. "They liked the idea, and now we are looking at important chapters in the book – for example on Tantra and sexuality, on breath, on the importance of awareness – and

finding beautiful discourses on those subjects. So this will come out as our first combined book and audio project."

This pioneering step may have profound consequences. Audio 'talking' books show the biggest growth in today's publishing industry, with over two billion dollars in sales in America alone – testament from a leisure-oriented society that it requires less effort to listen than to read.

Since all of Osho's books are transcripts from his live, spontaneous discourses, his disciples are uniquely placed to take advantage of this trend. In fact, in terms of the huge sales of Osho audio tapes – especially in India – Osho is already the world's best-selling audio book author.

Several audio publishers have released titles from Osho in the past 18 months, with sales exceeding expectations. "The publishers have adjusted to the fact that they will get Osho only the way he originally spoke," said Pramod. "There will be no readings by actors, no editing, nothing like what is usually done when putting a written book on tape. And actually they really love that."

"America is especially ripe for this new industry because it is a commuting culture with walkmans and car stereos, with radios at home or at work that are turned on all day," he added. "Tom Wolfe recently produced his first audio-only book – that means it is not published on paper at all – and it is a great success."

"Moreover, statistics show that the hottest area in talking books is 'self help,' where people are looking for ways to improve themselves, and we fit into that category. Market-wise, audio book buyers are above average in income, have a higher education than average, are multiple car owners and are 70 percent women. If you want to think in terms of ideal markets for Osho, this is one of them."

WHERE THE ENERGY IS

Osho International New York has the challenging task of coordinating the worldwide publishing of Osho's words. "When Osho International opened in

London, back in 1993, we knew it was only a stepping stone and that it was going to end up in New York. We just didn't know how long it would take," said Sahajanand.

"New York is the 'content capital' of the world," he added. "Even with the Internet and the World Wide Web, the most web content is created in New York City."

"This has surprised a lot of people. In the initial days of the web, everyone was thinking that, since no one needs an expensive New York office to create content, this will take place in cheaper locations like Virginia or Arizona."



Elegant entrance: where the energy is...

The experts were wrong. New York is where the energy is – and that's where the publishing is. And that is why Osho International has ended up on the 46th floor of a beautiful Art Deco office building on 51st and Lexington in midtown Manhattan, known as the "old General Electric building" and constructed in the same year as the Empire State building.

Ma Deva Sarito, one of Osho Times International's roving correspondents, writes from inside the 1920s monolith: "The building itself is spectacular. Recently renovated, it has amazing detail of inlaid wood and deco filigree – definitely the Zorba aspect of Osho's style."

Pramod continues, "There's a tower from the 14th floor up, so we don't have to share our floor with anybody. From the elevator you come directly into our space. It will be very Zen-like, definitely not looking like an office. It will be a presentation space

for Osho for the publishing world."

And the publishing world is certainly close by. Many of the big commercial publishers are located in Manhattan. Random House, the biggest trade publisher in the world, is literally just around the corner on 50th.

KEEP THEM AS THEY ARE

At this point in the story, we take a break from the unfolding development of Osho's work to look at nitty gritty problems that face disciples and publishing editors. What, for example, are they allowed to edit in Osho's discourses? What happens to Osho's famous jokes?

"Basically we take the approach that nothing can be edited," said Sahajanand. "Where we sometimes allow jokes to be cut is where things are too dated to be relevant – for example jokes about Moraji Desai – or where a 'politically incorrect' joke may not be at the end of a discourse, but within the discourse and not necessarily in the context of making a point, or where the joke may even be illegal in a certain country.

"We've checked this quite extensively," he continued. "Osho's statements like, 'Mother Teresa should be hanged, Jesus is a hunchbacked criminal, the Pope is responsible for Ethiopia...' none of this got cut and never will be because this is Osho's vision and he is very clear with that.

"Even if the Pope, or the President of the United States, or the Christian Church, or Mother Teresa would have sued, I think that would have been fun. It would have been worth it, because then you're taking Osho's work to a different level. Those would be unprecedented lawsuits that would catch the world media's attention."

The fight to keep Osho unedited has not always been easy. "One of the first outside publishers to work with Osho's words was Boxtree in Britain," Sahajanand recalled. "They wanted to make a lot of edit changes. We had a pretty intense dialogue with them. For example, they didn't want Osho to be harsh on women, but we couldn't let that be taken out.

"Those were very interesting dialogues – so we are making it clear that Osho cannot be cut, and this is the responsibility of the copyright holder, Osho International Foundation in Switzerland."

COMPILATIONS: OSHO'S TRUST

Another delicate area is the art of creating compilations from Osho's discourses that address specific themes, rather than verbatim discourses. "On the one hand, Osho is very strong about not taking him out of context," said Sahajanand. "But when asked



Osho in His library

about compilations he has expressed an immense trust in the people involved in the projects – that they wouldn't let their minds get in the way and distort his message."

But like everything with Osho, there is a wide horizon, a range, of what he says on every subject, and for his disciples it's a delicate walk along a razor's edge. Sahajanand recalled that, in 1989, when PanMusic began to make Osho's audio tapes available on the Indian market, they wanted to edit his discourses. Osho said "No, take only complete answers to people's questions. You can change the

question but not the answer."

In a publishing marketplace that likes to be theme-oriented, selected Osho compilations provide an easy bridge for new people to understand his vision. The idea is that, later on, when the connection is made, people will naturally graduate to the discourse books – and ultimately will realize that anyway, if they really want to understand this paradoxical mystic, they will have to go beyond his words altogether.

"In the meantime," Sahajanand adds, "we will make sure that the *big books* – Osho's discourse series books – are always available from Rebel through the Internet and worldwide distributors. But they won't be on the shelves of all the bookshops, because from a commercial perspective that is not affordable or practical."

OSHO'S PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

No matter what is going on with the commercial market, the simple fact is that only Rebel Books are produced the way Osho wants his books to look.

"Rebel is different in the sense that, from the first editing to the end of production, everything, including every design element in the book – up to the size of the font – is exactly how Osho wants his books to be," says Ma Prem Shunyo, a disciple involved with Rebel Books in the Commune.

"We feel very strongly about maintaining this standard because we are first generation working with his books. If we stay strictly to these elements, the next generation might keep up with it. We try to keep it 24 karat gold. We want to keep it pure, no compromising, and by 'chance' there are now two editors here who worked on the first of Osho's books. These old editors can pass on what they know to new editors," Shunyo explained.

"To begin with, all Rebel Books are hardcover not paperback, because Osho said that he didn't want his books to be read once and thrown – that they can be read many times. He wanted to make them as affordable as possible, so they are sold at cost price.

Thirdly, his picture is on the front cover of every book, and the title or his name, or both, are in either gold or silver foil on every book," she added.

"Osho has such strong ideas about his books, in spite of all financial considerations. It would be much easier to produce and sell Rebel Books in paperback, but it is not to be," Shunyo reflected.

"Osho spent more time with his secretaries working on his books than on anything else. He took a very active part. For example, he actually designed the Rebel Books' logo. And I know that at least with one book, *From Darkness to Light*, he drew the original sketch for the design of the jacket cover. He chose pictures for the books and left us his choices for future book jackets as well as future titles to use.



"For the rest of our lifetime and for the next few generations to come, there will be full-on work with Rebel. The challenge is to keep all of Osho's books in print, publish the Hindi-to-English translations and keep the books moving, selling. At the moment there are 60 books out of print – not including the Darshan Diaries which will not be reprinted but will be compiled."

Shunyo recalled that, in November 1989, Osho sent a message to his Hindi translators to get the translations done as fast as they possibly can and not to spend too long agonizing over one word.

"He told them, 'Do my upanishads first.' At this point, the last upanishad is being edited. Already edited and waiting to be published is *Katha Upanishad: Dialogues With the Lord of Death*."

Many Rebel Books are soon to be released or re-released, including *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood*, in which Osho tells stories about himself; *The Supreme Doctrine*, one of the upanishads; *When the Shoe Fits*, a book on Tao and *The Path of Love*, a newly-designed edition on Kabir.

There are two new Hindi-to-English translations: *The Path of Meditation*, a translation of Osho's own sutras on meditation and *Hidden Mysteries*, which came out in October. In addition, Rebel Books just won two design prizes in India for *India My Love* and *Tantra the Supreme Understanding*.

It's pretty obvious that Osho's vision for his books reaches far beyond the grave. Before leaving his body in 1990, he left a series of titles – *Notes From the Grave* being one of the most intriguing – for future publication, many of which are now in print.

Printed titles from this series include: *From Medication to Meditation*, *Meditation: The First and Last Freedom*, *Words From a Man of No Words*, *Gold Nuggets*, *What is Meditation?* and *India my Love*.

"All of these are on 'Osho's list' and many are best sellers," commented Sahajanand. "You can certainly say there is some enlightened insight in that list. Maybe we will sell a lot more Osho books when more of these compilations come out."

A GLOBAL PLAYER

Outside of the English and Hindi languages, Osho's words are moving in unexpected ways. "When I was in New York last April, we had scheduled a meeting with our literary consultant regarding publishing in the Spanish language," Sahajanand related.

"That is one of the most complex publishing areas in the world, because it includes all of the Latin American countries except Brazil, plus North America – where there is a 40 million Spanish speaking population – and Spain.

"On the very day of our meeting in New York we received two faxes asking for Osho titles from two publishing houses in Barcelona, one of them the biggest phenomenon in Spanish publishing and the eighth biggest publisher in the world. It was such a strange coincidence! Our literary consultant was blown out of her socks! She said, 'Regardless of who Osho is, when this kind of thing happens to you, you are a global player in publishing.'

Sahajanand continued, "Today we are involved with more publishers who have *nothing* to do with sannyas than with publishers who have *something* to do with sannyas. This has certainly put the old thought form on its head!"

The global role call is certainly impressive: Osho now has the biggest publisher in Italy (Mondadori), the biggest in Spain (Grupa Planeta), one of the top four in Brazil (Ediouro), the 2nd in Germany (Heyne), one of the top 10 in America (St. Martin's Press) and Element with Penguin distribution in the UK.

THE ITALIAN CONNECTION

If anyone can claim responsibility for the success story in Italy – apart from Osho himself – it is Swami Anand Videha, who for years has been working steadily with a wide spectrum of Italian publishers. So far he has produced 120 Osho titles with 23 publishing companies. This year *What is Meditation?* reached No. 7 on the Italian best seller lists in its category, less than a month after publication and has sold out its 15,000 print run within three months.

Videha has also moved Osho into the media area of popular magazines. The September issue of *Vera* featured major arcana cards from the Osho Zen Tarot as a special give-away bonus for its customers. Inside, the meanings of the cards were described with sample layouts and a general introduction to Osho and his vision. The 500,000 print run sold out and gave the magazine its highest sales in more than four years.

In October, the Italian edition of *Elle*, the international women's magazine, did its own presentation of Osho: a long and heartfelt description of the 'Master of Freedom' and why Osho and his Commune attract so many intelligent people from the West.

As Osho's books spread, disciples involved with publishing encounter a new challenge: languages and areas where there are no sannyasins to act as producers and agents.

"We are thinking about working with professional literary agents in these areas," said Pramod. "After talking with our literary consultant in New York all of us at Osho International became clear that no one can explain what Osho represents as well as sannyasins, but at the same time we cannot continue traveling around so much.

"We are finding a formula whereby literary agents will represent us in technical terms and then, when it comes to meeting with publishers and presenting Osho and his works, staff from Osho International will go to the meetings."

OVERLOADING THE MARKET?

Pramod and other disciples involved with publication have to be careful not to overload the market. "We don't need 600 visible titles in every bookshop around the world," he explained. "Today, competition and costs in the industry are such that shipping and returns are big factors for major publishing houses.

"In this regard, the virtual stores with websites on the Internet, such as amazon.com, have an incredible advantage in being able to take an order, locate it in their 2.5 million inventory and ship it within 48 hours.

"To stay competitive, the Holtzbrinck media empire – to which St. Martin's Press belongs – recently spent \$30 million on creating an all-digital ware-

house where laser-guided robots locate books using barcode systems, so that their 59 million book inventory can be shipped efficiently.

"In this kind of environment, we have to consider the publisher's reality. We cannot simultaneously dump a hundred titles – or even ten – by different publishers on the market in one country without causing ourselves damage."

Another factor is commercial viability. Beautiful hardcover Rebel Books, printed in Germany or India, are not easily acceptable to the American market.

"They are simply not the form an average book buyer will buy," Pramod explained. "People tend to walk around with a paperback in their jeans, or in a backpack. Some distributors have told us they wouldn't take a hardcover even if it was the same price as a paperback.

"Holtzbrinck, for example, creates book warehousing for a shelf life of one week, two weeks, one month – at the very, very most 12 months. That's the limit before which a book is supposed to move off the shelf and into a buyer's hands. Rebel prints its hardcover list for an average shelf life of seven years!

WEB MAGIC AT osho.org

Responding to the revolution triggered by the Internet, Osho International has created a place for Osho on the World Wide Web at <http://www.osho.org> which receives half a million visits a year. There are also sites in the German language, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, with Dutch and Hindi in the pipeline.

It's not a small web site – osho.org offers 1,000 web pages with information about Osho, a database of worldwide contact addresses, daily updates



Click here: a Commune web page

on Osho Commune International, its groups and programs, plus a display of photos that offers a beautiful visual tour of the Commune. Audio discourses and Osho's meditation music can now be listened to, and soon full screen videos will be available.

The site is linked with one of the web's largest travel information services, which refers visitors to osho.org

pages on how to navigate Mumbai airport and information about staying in Pune.

Osho's books, naturally, are part of the website's menu. There is an Osho book catalog and a general resource library for all Osho books in print, with links to the audio discourse format. And there is a bookshop environment where shoppers can order most of the Rebel Books and Osho's tapes through osho.org's Osho International Book Club.



Hidden Mysteries: moving the books

There's more, much more, but who can digest so much information in a single gulp? Suffice it to say that an additional shop will soon open, making available Osho's photos and art, and will introduce a novel form of publishing – the Screen Book.

The first of these will be *Nirvana: The Last Nightmare*, which has been unavailable in print for some time. This will be downloadable via computer in a simple, elegant format, and the on-screen text can be searched for key words of interest to the reader.

THE END OF THE BOOK?

In a way, it's ironic. Once heralded as 'the end of the book,' the web has turned into a literary blessing: book selling is now the biggest commercial transaction area on the Internet – and Osho's books are poised to benefit as much as any.

Take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and allow a little more information to enter: also in the one thousand pages of osho.org is a popular 'webzine' section with 'Mood of the Moment' and 'Zen Stick of the Week' – a spot

for Osho to deconstruct some popular myth or other. FamilyTrack, one of the top family education sites, probably received the Zen stick of the week by bestowing an award on osho.org before reading Osho on 'Families are Out of Date.'

There is also a busy 'Ask Osho' column. In a 'Community' section of the web, one visitor to this facility commented, "Osho will answer your questions, but man is he scary!"

COMING TO OSO VIA BOOKS

According to staff at the Osho Academy of Initiation – where people request to take sannyas – about 90 percent say they first heard of Osho through a friend and one of Osho's books.

Moreover, there is a strong correlation between growth in worldwide sales of translations of Osho's books and the diversity of visitors to Osho Commune. The Commune recently conducted a survey of the numbers of people coming from each country and noted that 100 countries are now represented, compared with 52 three years ago.

This reflects the large growth in foreign language editions in the past few years, including Lithuanian, Estonian, Serbo-Croatian, Georgian, and Russian – half a million books have been sold in Russia in the past three years – Bulgarian, Danish, Hebrew, Greek, Urdu, Indonesian, Polish, Portuguese, Tamil and Bengali.

Leaving aside, for a moment, the steady stream of Indian visitors to the Commune, the rest of the world currently walks in the gate in the following percentages: 25% Germans, 12% Italians, 7% Americans, Japanese and British. Underlining the book correlation, the remaining 56% comprise mainly Israelis, Far Easterners, Eastern and Central Europeans and South Americans.

INSIDE INDIA

The number of Indians coming to Osho Commune has gone up 112 percent in the past three years, reflecting the changing climate of opinion in

this country about its most unique and controversial mystic.

"Osho is becoming more appreciated and recognized every month, every year," reported Swami Satya Vedant, Chancellor of Osho Multiversity and a Commune spokesperson. "This trend is right across the population: young, old, workers, artists, bureaucrats, administrators, different religious groups.

"This is possible because, in the last seven years, a lot of hard work has been put into establishing bridges – that's why we see the flowering of Osho's work," he added.

Kushwant Singh, one of India's best known authors and social commentators, has announced that Osho belongs with Nehru, Gandhi and Buddha among the top ten most important people in India's history. The national parliament in New Delhi seems to agree with him: its library has placed a complete set of Osho's books in a special section named after the author – a privilege hitherto enjoyed only by Mahatma Gandhi.

Earlier this year, the release of Osho's tribute to his native country, *India My Love*, was a phenomenal success, becoming an instant best-seller. At the World Book Fair in New Delhi, the official release was made by Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Union Finance Minister and architect of the much-heralded liberalization of India's economy.

Osho is, in fact, India's best-selling author with 450 book titles in 13 Indian languages. His books and audio tapes sell at the rate of over one million per year.

The new urban generation, growing up with television is becoming familiar with Osho through daily airings of the mystic's discourses on the satellite network Star TV – which reaches 100 million households in 56 countries from Hong Kong to Saudi Arabia.

Viewers intrigued by his message then buy his books, available from commercial publishers at prices varying dramatically from 20 to 600 rupees, from locations as eclectic as train stations and five-star hotels.

Young people, particularly, feel that in Osho they have a doorway into spiritual self-discovery that is not available through conventional religions. Ma Dharm Jyoti, who leads Osho Meditation Camps around India, commented, "More than 50 percent of the participants in my camps are young men between 20 and 30 – college students or working – from middle class society.

"They are totally disillusioned with traditional religions and it seems Osho is the only outlet they can find. They ask questions their parents never contemplated, like 'What is this meaninglessness in life? What is depression?'

Jyoti sees this new trend as a product of exposure to the world through television. "They can already see the futility of things," she reflected. "Their quest for meaning is sincere and that is why they come to learn meditation in the camps."

FINDING OSO

Returning, for a moment, to the world of publishing, it's easy for the disciples involved in the global literary expansion to lose sight of the fact that Osho, in essence, is not an author.

"He is somebody with a really big vision to share – he talks, he doesn't write books," said Pramod. "One way to understand his message is through books, but if you look through the books themselves you see that he describes how this is going to change: most people will not be reading books in the future but will see him on TV, video or computer screens and listen to him on tapes.

"When I look at my personal history, I see that I didn't need to read all of Osho's books to understand that Osho was the man for me. It can be just one page in a book – and you get it. Even though not every Osho book is available all the time, there are so many ways for people to find him."

Before leaving his body, one of Osho's last utterances was "I leave you my dream." In terms of making his vision available to the world, the dream is clearly becoming a living reality. ☺