

Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic

By Osho

St. Martin's Griffin Press, 2001.

This intriguing book takes the reader on a whirlwind overview of the life of Osho, the (as the title so aptly states) "spiritually incorrect" guru. Not actually written in complete form by Osho himself, this autobiography was compiled 10 years after his death by Sarito Carol Neiman as an introduction to and overview of the man who spent his life escaping definition and embracing polemic. Neiman has used Osho's own words brilliantly to create a work in which Osho addresses the many myths and perceptions that have surrounded his legacy in both America and India. Osho's autobiography could perhaps be more appropriately titled the "Incorrect Myth", seeing that tales of sex cults, ninety-three Rolls-Royces and egotistical pomposity usually precede any mention of his vaguely-formed religio-philosophical ideals. *Autobiography* takes the reader beyond the sublime acts of anti-ascetic caliber that Osho is most commonly recognized for, and attempts to elucidate the man behind the mystery.

Autobiography is compiled from a selection of archival accounts of Osho's recantations of his childhood growing up in a small village in Madhya Pradesh, India, public speeches and talks with reporters and disciples, and interviews throughout his life. The history covered in the first half of the book has a tenor of insolent fantasy that segues succinctly into the adult vision of Osho that has become renowned the world over. Drawing on memories retold in dialogue form, a vision of Osho's childhood is retrospectively pieced together, placing a burden upon the reader to distinguish with little certainty events occurring in reality from those that are the recollections fondly colored by childhood imagination.

A significant portion of Osho's childhood memories lovingly focus upon the lessons fostered through the freedom obtained while living with his maternal grandparents from age one to seven. Osho inadvertently psychoanalyses himself by

defining his personality through his learned defiance of any adult who attempted to shape his opinions. This quest for personal freedom of choice defines his interactions, not only with his parents upon their reunion, but with all adults and figures of authority as he encounters them throughout his existence. As Osho aptly states, "[These chosen examples] are immensely significant in order to understand what happened during my whole life, because unless you understand the seed, you will miss the tree and the flowering, and perhaps the moon through the branches".

Autobiography presents a series of interviews in which Osho responds to critics who refer to him as Con Man, Cult Leader, a Rich Man's Guru, and an inappropriately egotistical "self-appointed" Bhagwan (one embodying godliness). His lucid and often painfully comical responses to these perceptions set the stage for the third section of the book, where Osho speaks at length against assumption, establishment, organizational religion, and even the coalescence of any one set of doctrines by which any person should strive to live their life. He overwhelmingly privileges phenomenology and the right to freedom as the heart of every truth and the essence of the message- if any- that he endeavors to impart upon humanity.

Although Osho studied philosophy and taught as a professor in India before opening his meditation centers in 1962, *Autobiography* continually maintains the universality of his "anti-philosophy" and never commits to any one strain of thought for the explicit purpose of proving that one path does not exist. It emphatically contradicts itself, at times praising enlightened beings such as Jesus and the Buddha for their vision, yet in the next breath maintaining their inherent shortcomings and asserting Osho's mental superiority; "[P]eople like Jesus, Moses, Mohommed, Krishna- [. . .] -don't know anything about enlightenment". While Osho

possesses a particular talent for offending and alienating every religious and philosophical doctrinal system and their leaders, he maintains a peculiar aura of jovialness and candor that emphasize the simplicity of his views on humanity. He adroitly combines empirical discourse on psychology, economics, religion, philosophy, poetry, and even gambling and driving, into a compelling argument for the breaking down of barriers between East and West, rich and poor, seekers and non-believers.

Autobiography brings to the forefront many practical aspects of Osho's life that get largely ignored due to the framework within which he existed. A truly anachronistic thinker, Osho would perhaps be better suited to live in this day of internet access and rapidly expanding globalization. His revolutionary involvement with promoting knowledge of the AIDS crisis in

the early 1980's, propensity towards inter-religious dialogue, and a philosophical embracing of polarities, were radical notions in the 1970's and 1980's, but which deserve reevaluation in light of where the world has progressed in the years since Osho's passing in 1990.

Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic reinforces the notion that it is impossible to ever know exactly who Osho was. Legend will always be larger than life concerning a man with the charisma and brilliance to develop a following and a philosophy without any structure, tenants, or dogma. While it is not easy to unilaterally agree with Osho, it is even more difficult to disagree with him. Any inquisitive mind will find *Autobiography* to be an exercise in critical thinking that is cataclysmic in its potential relevance to the world today.

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