

To whom it may concern;

Dear Sir,

To my great surprise I heard the news that Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh has been refused by the U.S.A authorities to immigrate. This refusal is not very clear to me, as I know Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh as a unique religious teacher and Master.

By this letter I would like to share my experiences as a sannyasin of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

My name is Shantam Sono, I am a 33 year old woman and for three years now I am a disciple of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

I studied commercial and financial sciences at the university of Antwerp, Belgium.

During 5 years I taught economics at a Catholic secondary school. To my disappointment I realised that for most of my colleagues, students and myself our religious live was dead and dull.

It was more like a structure in which we worked, but it was not a living and fullfilling experience.

At the same time I got difficulties in my relationship with other people. As I didn't feel satisfied with my work situation nor with my personal life, I began to search for essential values in life.

I felt that I had a strong intellectual formation, but that I was not free emotionally. I came in touch with personal growth movements and at the same time with meditation; two aspects I wanted to bring to a synthesis in my daily life.

In 1976 it happened that an "enlightenment intensive" program came into my attention, leaded by disciples of Bhagwan.

During this week-end I experienced a beautiful combination of inner growth and meditation. This first introduction to Bhagwan and his religious teachings left a deep impression on me; for the first time in my life I got the experience of becoming closer to my real self.

Since that time I started to become more alive, as if I had been sleep-walking before. I wanted to take a jump into life. Together with 6 people we started to built up a spiritual community in the mountains.

The confrontation with nature, the hard work and living close together with the other members and guests brought me very close to myself to my positivity, my strength but at the same time to my negativity, distrust in life, my physical and other limits.

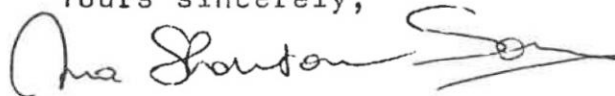
At that time I was in connection with Bhagwan through his books and the meditation techniques we practised regularly. After 1 1/2 years of hard work and living I felt the need to meet Bhagwan in Poona, where he lived at the time. There I enjoyed the lectures of Bhagwan and being in his presence brought me into a new dimension I didn't experience before. I realised that I needed the guidance of a living Master to bring me to the real experiences of life, to help me to live my life with more awareness and I became a disciple of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

Since that time my perception of religion changed a lot. I realised that religion has nothing to do with philosophical argumentation or dead rituals, but that it is a living experience of life in its totality, that it has to do with self-acceptance on all levels, being non-judgemental, a communication with existence through people and nature in a lovingly and joyous way. This year I got the chance to visit Rajneeshpuram and to participate in several courses. It was a real revelation to me to see Bhagwan again in good health and to sit with him in darshan at his last Birthday Celebration.

Back in Belgium afterwards I realised that although the outer circumstances of my life haven't changed so much; I live life totally different as before I met Bhagwan. I am happy to know Bhagwan and I hope many more people will have the chance to meet him and his teachings. To be in touch with him is like living a hundred lives in one lifetime.

I just come back from the second annual world celebration in Rajneeshpuram and I really enjoyed to be in his presence. His silence touched my heart more than ever. I am sure that this refusal is not definite and that the U.S. authorities are still willing to review their decision, as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh is a most remarkable Master.

Yours sincerely,



Ma Shantam Sono

(Mertens Marie-Gabrielle)

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