

324 Willoughby  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
July 21, 1983

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Application for U.S. residence of  
SRI BHAGWAN RAJNEESH

As a man of many parts & wide experience, and--though not at all a member of this group--having visited Rancho Rajneesh, and having seen the good works created through the Bhagwan and observed the remarkable interaction between the Bhagwan and his disciples during his daily drives, I think it would be both unfortunate (in the sense of this country's losing the Bhagwan's unique presence) and unconstitutional (as a violation of religious freedom) if the Bhagwan were not allowed to continue his residence in the U.S.

More positively, the Bhagwan should be allowed to stay here.

Among my many careers, I have been and am a photographer, having documented Trans-Alaska Pipeline construction (with shows at the University of Oklahoma Museum of Art, the San Jose Museum of Art, and the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry) as well as using photography as a fine art (being repeatedly chosen in juried group shows as "Alaska Positive" and the "All-Alaska Juried Art Show", as well as receiving a grant from the Juneau Council on Arts and Humanities, the Alaska State Council on the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts). I was also a past president of the Juneau Council on Arts & Humanities.

I've also been active in politics, being trained as Ph.D. in Government at Claremont Graduate School (where I was a John C. Lincoln School of Public Finance Fellow), having been a candidate for U.S. Senate, the Alaska State Legislature, and Mayor of Juneau, and have worked as a voter registrar and elections official, as well as being an alternate or delegate to district, state, and national conventions, and finance officer to an Alaska State Central Committee...as well as vice-chair for the Juneau Unified Precinct Committee.

I've had a great many different jobs--from economics professor to cab driver, from commercial fisherman to television news reporter, from state and federal civil servant to heavy equipment operator... and these many occupations have allowed me to look at the world from quite a number of different angles, a view not often given to single individuals nowadays in an age of specialization.

Clearly there is something worthwhile happening at Rancho Rajneesh, a place whose existence and followers are clearly inspired by the Bhagwan. This raw land is being rapidly developed and improved... and like most rapid developments has disturbed the tranquility of those who lived there previously. But in addition to the usual developer's tactic of sinking in large sums of money, the Bhagwan and his followers have had the good grace and sense to participate

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in the American practice of democracy and use votes also.

The development of this desert land, by building lakes and roads and houses, is relatively rare in present-day America, particularly when inspired, as Rancho Rajneesh appears to be, by a religious leader. It takes a considerable spiritual power, so to inspire people to do this sort of major work without pay-- and so it seems to me that some sort of judgement can be made from the effects: knowing, first-hand, what effort it takes to inspire people to do virtually anything, isn't it likely that the Bhagwan must have some special spirit and/or spiritual power, so to inspire so many to do so much? \* And for so little in return....

And, very clearly, this is in part a consequence of the many spiritual books he has written and, particularly, in part a consequence of the daily drives through Ranch roads lined with his followers. Though all are silent as the Bhagwan passes slowly, slowly by, perhaps two feet away from the thin red line of his followers, there is very clearly some sort of silent communication taking place between them, as the Bhagwan's smile results in many glowing faces left behind.

In the end, no doubt, the question will come down to the application of one or another rule. While rules are meant to be applied fairly, as any student of bureaucracy knows, all rules are subject to interpretation....and all rules have exceptions as well.

What I ultimately suggest is that it is worthwhile for the U.S. to find an interpretation favorable to the Bhagwan's continued stay here, or even to make an exception to the general rule if that is necessary. No glory is gained for this country if it engages in religious persecution, nor will those who would banish such a special spirit be doing a service for U.S. Let him stay....if he wants.

Sincerely & cordially,

  
Joe Sonneman

\*And is it not particularly noteworthy and remarkable, that he can so inspire people through silence and through writings, in an age when advertisers must shout to be heard...and no one reads anymore?