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A Declaration of Integrity

An open letter from Andrew Cohen to his friends and foes

About seven years ago, I was giving a talk at a bookstore in Seattle. Afterwards, while signing books, I was taken aback when an unassuming young man came up to me, shook my hand, and said, quite unselfconsciously, with a smile on his face: “Andrew, it’s really nice to finally have the chance to meet you. I’d always been told that you were the devil.”

There’s something uniquely disconcerting about the dawning realization that countless people you have never met are holding an image of you that doesn’t even remotely resemble reality. It’s a strange predicament that I’ve lived with almost from the day I became a teacher of enlightenment, but in recent years it has become more extreme, due in large part to the dedicated efforts of a group of former students who seem to have made it their life mission to create and spread a negative picture of who I am, in a couple of books and in online forums.

I know many people have wondered why I have not responded sooner to all of this. To be honest, I simply didn’t know how to even start. Everything I was being accused of was so absurdly misrepresented and taken so far out of context, so obviously designed only to malign me and my work and cause doubt about my integrity, that I was reduced to a two-dimensional caricature of a cultural stereotype: the “charismatic and corrupt guru.” The motives of my detractors appeared so transparent that I thought they would be obvious to others, and I naively concluded that there was no point in responding. Besides, it just felt beneath my dignity to do so. I was wrong. I have now, obviously belatedly, come to understand that my lack of response is being considered by some as an admission of guilt or wrongdoing, or even worse, as a lack of integrity in itself. Respected friends had advised me: “Let your work speak for itself.” I had hoped that anybody with the eyes to see would easily recognize that the ever-evolving creativity, rationality, and open-mindedness of my teaching and my magazine, together with the confidence, *joie de vivre*, and open-heartedness expressed by my students consistently over a long period of time, just didn’t jibe with the bizarre picture my detractors were trying to paint. But it seems that the time has come for me to speak out more directly and set the record straight.



Almost from the very beginning of my teaching career, over twenty years ago, people have responded to me in extreme ways. I have been perceived by some to be a dangerous character, possessed of unusual charisma and spiritual energy that could seduce the weak-minded and innocent seeker to abandon all common sense, objectivity, autonomy, and self-respect and become one of his helpless minions—soul-ravaged and mind-controlled. I’ve been branded a pathological narcissist who never recovered from his childhood traumas and unhealthy relationship with his mother and as a result was using his power position as spiritually

enlightened guru to dominate and control others in order to compensate for his lack of self-esteem.

On the other hand, there have been those (some of whom are now, ironically, my worst detractors) who hailed me as a spiritual hero, a 21st century Buddha, a true revolutionary and spiritual activist whose unwillingness to compromise the standards of his own teaching, even in his most intimate and important relationships, was an expression of an unusual degree of courage and a rare commitment to the highest.

I guess it goes with the territory: to be a guru in a postmodern context one has to be either crazy or very courageous—neither of which are characteristics I find it easy to relate to. More than anything else, I’ve always aspired to be an authentic human being, and that’s why the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me, as far as I’m concerned, was a few years ago, after a teaching in North Carolina, when the gentleman who had driven me to the airport told me: “Andrew, you are a real *mensch*. Even if you weren’t enlightened, I’d still want to be your friend.”

In fact, it has been my unwavering commitment to authenticity, transparency, and integrity that has been both the thing that has attracted so many to me, and that which others find the most threatening. It has always bewildered me that I have been accused of lacking integrity, when in fact it is my integrity that makes me such a challenging teacher.



I learned long ago that most people understand “enlightenment” to simply mean the attainment of higher states of consciousness and the capacity to transmit those states to others. Many falsely assume that the attainment of those higher states means that the enlightened individual is morally evolved and has reached a high level of personal integrity, even though endless tales of corruption and abuse of power by apparently enlightened individuals over the last thirty years has proved that that is definitely not necessarily the case. It is well known by anyone who has followed my adventures in the spiritual world that the first ten years of my teaching career were spent in large part dealing with and endlessly scrutinizing this issue, in my public discourses and dialogues, in the pages of the magazine I created for this very reason, as well as in discussions with my students and most intimate friends.

My own teacher, guru, and spiritual master Sri H.W.L. Poonja made the human complexity of spiritual attainment all too clear to me. Like few others, he could directly transmit the boundless freedom and nondual bliss and radiance of the ground of all being with a mere glance. And at the same time, he could look you straight in the eye and tell you a bald-faced lie without even a flicker of conscience. Our eventual parting of the ways was one of a series of extremely painful, emotionally shattering breakups that I’ve experienced because of my unwillingness to compromise my own integrity. I think, in the end, it’s been that unwillingness to compromise that has, over time, led to the myth created by several former students, including even my own mother, that I am some kind of strange aberration—a two-dimensional caricature who somehow inexplicably attracts people to him like a magnet and at the same time, for no apparent reason, sadistically torments them. I think the reason they have succeeded, to some degree, in tarnishing my reputation is that they have deliberately evoked a stereotype that is such easy emotional bait in a cultural climate that is hypersensitive to and suspicious of hierarchy in any form.

I have always been very public about the fact that I am a guru in the true sense of the word, at a time when, ironically, that title can be used respectably in just about any field except

spirituality. As far as I'm concerned, any spiritual teacher worth his or her salt, any true guru, is someone who is sincerely endeavoring to pull people not only to a higher state of consciousness but also to a higher stage of development—to literally raise their center of gravity up the spiral of human evolution. But in our postmodern culture, the notion of anything “higher” than the individual and his or her sensitive self is treated with suspicion or contempt. As a matter of fact, especially in spiritual circles, pluralism is revered and seen as the very expression of spiritual development: “All is one and in the eyes of God, we are all equal and perfect just as we are....” Any challenge to the inherent perfection of the narcissistic self sense is seen as the ultimate threat to the biggest illusion in town. And it is! And therefore, *so am I...*

My spiritual fire, my passion for God, love, and truth, has always been, from the very beginning, not only a call to let go of the mind and time in order to experience the inherent fullness and perfection of the ground of all being, but also, and even more importantly, it has been a call for a *real* spiritual revolution—a call to rise up, to transform, to give oneself wholeheartedly to the ecstatic compulsion to *evolve* for the sake of life itself. That revolutionary call to go all the way has been, I think, what has attracted people to me and what has defined my brand of enlightenment for a very long time. I also think it's what's gotten all but the most serious and committed into deeper water than they were prepared to swim in.



I have always been very upfront about the demanding nature of the path that I teach. As a matter of fact, I don't think I've ever given a teaching, to a small or large gathering, in public or in private, where I have not implicitly or explicitly repeated this mantra, over and over again: “If you really want to do this, it's going to take everything you've got, and more...” Why do I say this? Because I know it's true. That's what it has taken and continues to take for me, every single day, to live this extraordinary life. And I believe that for anyone who is truly serious about the evolution of consciousness and making a real difference in this world, it will take the same. It's neither a game nor a part-time endeavor. That's why the first tenet of my teaching, which lays the foundation for absolutely everything else, is called *Clarity of Intention*, and it states that in order to succeed, the desire to evolve has to become more important than anything else.

To some, this may sound extreme. But it's simply the nature of what I teach and who I am. And to those who see themselves as being truly serious about the spiritual endeavor, it's exactly what is so compelling about me as a teacher and the path that I teach. It's definitely not for everybody—that's been true from the very beginning and it's also never been a secret. The path that I call Radical Transformative Impersonal Evolutionary Enlightenment or, simply, Evolutionary Enlightenment, is a complete path, in that it offers a total engagement with the spiritual life in a postmodern context. That's not to say that there aren't many ways for people to engage with and benefit from this teaching in the context of the lives they are already living—indeed, I have a whole international network of students who are doing just that. But what is interesting is that this teaching has from the very beginning inspired some to leave behind their former lives so that they could wholeheartedly pursue the thrilling potential of the higher vision that they had seen. As a matter of fact, in the early days I was often amazed to see how many people seemed to feel compelled to take that step, even though way back then it was not something I had planned or expected.

The inherently all-consuming nature of the spiritual/evolutionary impulse itself is one of the things that has been grossly misrepresented by those who seek to undermine me and

the potential of the bold experiment my students and I are engaged in. It's often portrayed as if a life of total engagement is somehow being forced upon individuals, rather than being a freely chosen, truly higher aspiration. But of course, from the very beginning, the radical and revolutionary nature of my vision has been perceived as a threat to the status quo of our postmodern, egalitarian, pluralistic culture where the passing whims and desires of the individual, enlightened or not, are always held more sacred than any higher context, calling, or purpose.



One of the most powerful transformative experiences people have with this teaching is the discovery of a profound sense of *purpose*. That deepest of revelations—that it *means something* to exist—frees us from the deadliest existential sickness of modernity and the postmodern revolution: nihilism, the often not-so-conscious fear at the core of our being that existence is meaningless. After all, what could give the alienated self a greater sense of purpose than being a vehicle for the evolution of consciousness itself, which is what this teaching is all about? But of course, to be in a position to authentically and consciously participate in the evolution of consciousness, in the creation of a spiritual revolution, an enormous price has to be paid.

Being deeply inspired by the idea of creating a spiritual revolution is one thing. Being prepared to follow through on what that actually means is another thing altogether. There's something very romantic about the idea of being a revolutionary, and for postmodern narcissists, which most of us are, it can be an irresistibly compelling self-image. But whether there is any substance behind that image is a different story. Historically, when human beings have created real revolutions, overthrowing the old in order to create the new, they have been willing to die for their ideals. For one who is not a real revolutionary, however, but has become identified with the idea of being one, the dawning recognition that one is not really prepared to pay the price—which in this case means ego-transcendence—can be deeply shattering to one's image of oneself as a strong and courageous individual who is devoted to a higher purpose. I can't tell you how many times I've seen this happen. Ironically, it is the ultimate humiliation for the ego to come face to face with its own unwillingness to transcend itself. It is this simple but tragic predicament that has been at the core of some of my former students' unabated resentment and narcissistic rage.

The fundamental obstacle to any authentic teaching of enlightenment, past or present, is the ego, or the sense of an individual self that always sees itself as inherently separate from all of life, from the very process that produced it. And the contemporary expression of this perennial foe of radical transformation is more powerful and sophisticated than ever before. As a result of the evolution of our own culture, the serious spiritual aspirant today must do battle with the highly developed, super-individuated, cynical, extremely narcissistic, “nobody-tells-me-what-to-do” postmodern self-sense that is the product of the latter half of the twentieth century. And authentically evolving beyond the powerful grip of that false self is no joke! I think too many of us may underestimate what it actually takes to transcend its allure to such a degree as to be able to manifest a meaningful, measurable, and authentic degree of freedom and autonomy in relationship to it.

I know there are those who are convinced that seeing ego as a problem is an outdated perspective that only adds fuel to the fire, and that simply “accepting” and “making space” for it is the more “enlightened” approach. But I beg to differ. It may sound good in theory, but

the ability to recognize ego for what it is, in all its gross and often very subtle manifestations, to “accept” it and simultaneously *not act out of it*, requires a level of self-mastery that, to be brutally honest, is attained by very few. I have found that for most, transcending what would traditionally be called our “lower impulses” may require the willingness to struggle as if our life depended on it. Because if we want to evolve beyond ego in a way that is truly going to make a difference, it literally does.

It is for this reason that I am not and never have been the kind of teacher who will tell people, “You’re wonderful just as you already are,” because unless they have been born saints (after all, such things *are* possible), it simply isn’t likely to be the case, and there’s no doubt that they, as we all do, have a long way to go. And for extreme narcissists, facing this simple fact seems to be quite a challenge. As ridiculous as it sounds, for the postmodern seeker, the most shocking revelation is that they are not necessarily the inherently wonderful, decent, good, caring, well-intentioned soul (with maybe just a few minor flaws to shake off) that they had always secretly believed themselves to be. In fact, the gap between where we’re actually at and where we should be aspiring to reach if we’re serious about evolving in a profound way is usually far wider than we would care to imagine. Authentically endeavoring to face that gap directly is where most people balk.



In traditional, Eastern, premodern enlightenment, the ego was an obstacle because as long as one was hypnotized by its endless fears and desires, it was impossible to let go of compulsive identification with the mind and time and experience the bliss of Being. These days, the modern Western counterparts of those traditions, if they see the ego as a problem at all, do so only because it is the source of psychological pain and fear. But what I’m teaching is, dare I say it, a new kind of enlightenment, in which the goal is not only an individual attainment, but more importantly, a collective emergence that has tremendous evolutionary significance for us all. And therefore, I say the ego’s a problem for a much bigger reason: because the degree to which we are identified with it is the degree to which we inhibit our own potential to consciously participate in the evolutionary process. When the goal is to *create* a new stage of development *in* time and *through* the mind, ego is no longer just a personal psychological problem. It’s the one and only obstacle to the emergence of a new and glorious future. The creation of that future is what this teaching is dedicated to.

The whole idea is the cultivation of a new world in which human beings are able to meet each other in a shared, intersubjective, egoless field beyond fear and self-concern. A field where the very ground of human relationship is union, or what is traditionally called nonduality—the Oneness inherent in all of life that is discovered in spiritual revelation. In that infinitely compelling vision, one glimpses a completely new order of human potential, ecstatically experienced as unbearable positivity and the inspired passion to create, in time, in relationship, the manifest expression of the very glory one is being overwhelmed by.

The creation of such a future is entirely dependant upon cultivating a network of relationships with other individuals who are also freely choosing to embrace such an awesome task. And therefore, in this evolutionary context, one’s relationship to ego would have to become deadly serious, awake, mindful, and heroic. Keeping one’s ego in check for the sake of such a high and noble endeavor is extremely demanding, to say the least. But what a payoff! If there was ever any reason to transcend the fears and petty concerns of the narcissistic ego, this has

surely got to be it—the utopian ideal of creating heaven on earth. And for those who are truly inspired and committed to the highest spiritual ideals, as outrageous as it sounds, why not at least try?

The most inspired spiritual luminaries and their followers throughout history have almost always, in one form or another, been trying to create heaven on earth. Of course, I am also aware that some of the most deranged, deluded, and dangerous megalomaniacs in our spiritual and social history have persuasively proclaimed utopian idealism and wreaked havoc in its name. For every Buddha, there's been a Jim Jones; for every Martin Luther King there has been a Hitler; and I'm sure that will remain the case well into the distant future. But unlike so many of my contemporaries, I never have used this as an excuse to dampen my spiritual fire and my passion for and commitment to what I know, against all odds, *is* actually possible. I'm talking about a truly committed engagement with the fullest expression of the spiritual impulse—taking the risk of reaching for the highest, alone and together, to see how far we can take this.



This is the kind of inspired, spiritually charged environment or intersubjective field that is entered into and co-created by those who choose to become my students. It's easy to see how compelling and attractive this is to the deepest part of our self, to the evolutionary impulse, which I call the authentic self within each and every one of us, that yearns only to be utterly free and to be able to participate, creatively, wholeheartedly, and unselfconsciously in the life process for the highest purpose.

However, to whatever degree the authentic self is compelled to create the future, the ego, to that same degree, experiences the ultimate threat to its survival. As renowned Sufi master and prominent psychologist Robert Frager once told *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine: “The ego, or *nafs*, is scared of change, scared to death of deep mystical experience and transformation, because from its point of view, that kind of change is death. ... It is the part of all of us that wants to stay the same, a kind of inertial component ... that says, ‘Don't change.’” Any spiritual aspirant who even begins to respond seriously to the passion for liberation is more than likely to come face to face with this part of the self. But this “inertial component” or resistance to change comes to the surface in a much more dramatic way in a high-stakes, spiritually charged *intersubjective* context where people are coming together for the sole purpose of *ongoing*, radical individual and collective transformation. I believe that it is only in the creative friction of such a focused environment that new structures in consciousness *can* actually emerge, and at the same time, I have found that it is that very environment that inevitably calls forth that part of the self that fiercely resists those new structures.

Once again, the thrilling potential that is so tangible in an environment pregnant with evolutionary tension is precisely what is so attractive to the best part of ourselves, and simultaneously what threatens the ego more than anything else. That's why, for most of these years, my life has been an experience of heaven and hell simultaneously. I've lived awake to a glorious potential that most people have never even dreamed of, and simultaneously, have ongoingly experienced a ferocious resistance from the very people who have insisted they want nothing other than to dedicate their lives to the fulfillment of that potential. I guess this is what it's like to live on the edge, and this is what it's like to push the edge...

It's important to understand that the emergence of a new stage of human development

at the level of consciousness doesn't just happen by itself. Of course, initially, these new levels spontaneously emerge as temporary *states*, the ecstatic expansion of perception, emotion, and cognition that mesmerizes and inspires the soul in the most profound way imaginable. It is the experience of higher states that can convince even the most hardened cynic that in fact they have seen God. But in order for that glory that has been glimpsed in higher states to become the foundation for an actual level or permanent stage of individual and collective development, an enormous price has to be paid. More often than not, the mistake is made where simply because an individual has experienced a higher state they conclude that they have actually made that leap or transition to a higher stage. And that is rarely the case. Only with dedicated and consistent practice and committed engagement with the enormity of the task at hand can any individual or group actually make this momentous transition.

When one is authentically endeavoring to create a new stage, very deep emotional, psychological, and cultural structures have to be seen and overridden. For someone who is very serious and committed to such a bold endeavor, what could be more exciting, what could be more compelling? But there's no doubt that what I'm describing is nothing less than the ultimate challenge for the self: to transcend old structures and to create new ones at the leading edge. And anybody who proclaims that ego isn't a big deal obviously hasn't tried to do anything like this.



A couple of years ago, I interviewed Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, a brilliant young movie director, Tibetan lama, and *tulku* [reincarnation of a fully enlightened being.] The theme of our discussion was the challenge of being a guru in a postmodern Western context. I had originally been captivated by his bold statement, in a documentary made about his work, that the guru who “crushes your pride and makes this worldly life completely miserable is something that you ask for. He is the assassin ... the man or woman whom you have hired to completely dismantle you.” But I was taken aback when he admitted that with his own students, he wasn't promising he could do the job. “I may be a teacher,” he told me with surprising candor, “but I don't have that kind of courage because I love my reputation. Who wants to be referred to as an abuser? I don't.” I asked him about the great Tibetan gurus, such as Marpa, who was known for being one of the fiercest. He replied, “Oh, yes... *they* could do it because they had no agenda. Their only agenda was to enlighten. They didn't care what other people said or thought—I call it CCL: *couldn't-care-less-ness*. That holds the biggest power. But who has it today?” That's when I realized that for better or for worse, “CCL” was a quality that I had possessed from the very day I started teaching. And I've certainly paid the price.

I've been accused of going to extremes in order to break the grip of ego in my students. Some feel I've taken things too far at times, and accuse me of using “crazy wisdom” techniques for questionable motives. “Crazy wisdom” is a Tibetan term for teachers behaving in outrageous and seemingly irrational ways in order to shock their disciples awake from ignorance. And the unfortunate truth is, it has been used in recent times by Eastern and Western teachers to justify behavior that has in fact been for personal gain or serving less-than-enlightened motives. But I certainly don't refer to or think of myself as a crazy wisdom teacher. At the same time, I don't hesitate to say that for the sake of individual or collective development, I definitely have at times pushed my students very hard—not for personal gain and indeed, always at tremendous personal risk.



As a teacher who is not afraid to say he's pushing the edge and endeavoring to realize a potential above and beyond the popularized form of personal enlightenment that has become so common these days, I tend to attract students who are compelled by the notion of doing something revolutionary, together with others. Once again, I ceaselessly remind people that what we're doing transcends the California-style spiritual/therapeutic model and is, by its very nature, extremely demanding. Almost without exception, everyone insists not only that they understand what I'm saying, but that they are already fully prepared and equipped for the mission. But I never let anyone get deeply involved unless they express and demonstrate a clear and unambiguous commitment over a long period of time, appear to really understand the nature of the circumstance that they are choosing to enter into, and are fully willing to accept responsibility for the choice they are making.

Contrary to what many of my detractors would like people to believe, once someone chooses to commit to this path, they are fully cognizant of what that means. Indeed, a foundational tenet of my teaching is *the Law of Volitionality*, the whole point of which is to become more conscious of the choices that we are making, and to take the ultimately empowering step of accepting unconditional responsibility for ourselves. Everyone is given an enormous amount of help in order to learn how to do this.

In spite of this, at times my students have and still do put me in an impossible position. In an evolutionary context, it is only the individual's willingness to *change* that makes it possible for new potentials to emerge in the collective. In a unique and focused environment where the evolution of the whole depends upon the individuals involved to actually follow through on their commitment to change, the stakes get very high indeed. This is the scenario that has played itself out countless times: A student has been given everything they need in order to change—repeated direct experiences of higher states of consciousness; endless hours of teachings; personal guidance, love, affirmation, and encouragement; crystal clear reflection of their own particular issues that need to be faced and come to terms with; a network of friendship and support; techniques and practices to facilitate the process; and, of course, the biggest reason in the world to succeed! And still, for whatever reason, they come up against a wall of resistance, and irrationally refuse to do what they need to do, making deeper and higher development impossible and having detrimental effects on the whole that they are a part of.

It's in moments like these that I find myself in a double bind. The individual insists, in spite of repeated demonstrations to the contrary, that they *want* to do it, and yet continues to refuse to take the simple steps necessary to succeed. Sometimes this impasse can last for weeks or months on end, and I will eventually be obliged by the nature of my job description, which is to facilitate the evolution of the whole, to try and force the issue. That means either having to ask the individual to leave until they're willing to play ball, or exerting even greater pressure that would compel them to actually do what they have insisted they want to do more than anything else—change! What happens after this is one of only three possibilities: 1, the student is angry and resentful at being asked to leave; 2, they are angry and resentful for being pushed “too hard” and sometimes leave anyway; 3, the refusal breaks and a changed individual expresses gratitude beyond measure for what they now see as their guru's perseverance, compassion, and love for their own soul.



A good analogy for my strange predicament came to mind a few weeks ago, when I was hanging out with a group of my students, watching a TV show about the training practices of the Navy SEALs. One of my students remarked, “We’re like the Navy SEALs of the spiritual world!” Everybody burst out laughing. It may sound like a strange comparison to make, and I’m sure some people would think it crazy. But it seemed oddly appropriate—not just because of the demanding nature of their training process, but because the goal of the entire awe-inspiring ordeal is to get the recruit to “evolve” to the point where he cares more about his “team” than his personal wellbeing or even his physical survival. This is their definition of a “perfect warrior.” Later, I reflected more on this analogy: Imagine what it would be like to sign up for an elite force like the Navy SEALs, not make the grade, and quit, and then after leaving, turn around and complain that they’d pushed you “too hard” and you’d been humiliated, tortured, and abused... Give me a break!

As harsh as it may sound to some, the simple truth is that my most virulent critics are almost all former students who failed miserably. I know that to some this may sound like a “judgment” (god forbid!) and I also know that new age sensibilities may find it unacceptable, but that doesn’t mean it’s not true. As far as I’m concerned, the spiritual life is just like any other endeavor—you can succeed or fail. And when the goal is actual evolution beyond ego in an intersubjective context, success or failure is plain for all to see.

The fact is that the students I have asked the most from, and continue to ask the most from, are those who have been with me the longest, and are to varying degrees in positions of authority—publicly representing the teaching of evolutionary enlightenment and/or responsible for the emotional, psychological, and spiritual development of others. It’s no secret that the foundation of my whole teaching depends upon the cultivation of integrity, and that is why I’ll take great personal risks to ensure that those who are representing it publicly make every effort to bridge the gap between word and deed in themselves. Traditionally, one of the primary functions of the true guru is to be a mirror, reflecting to students not only the inherent freedom that already exists at the core of their own being, but also all the ways in which they are consciously and unconsciously deceiving themselves and others. That is the mandate behind my boldest demonstrations of this teaching function. Ironically, some of my harshest critics are a few former students who were once some of the strongest proponents of this at times uncompromising approach and wouldn’t hesitate to hold others to a standard that they were later outraged at being asked to live up to themselves.

What a crazy and unbelievable life I lead! So many admire and respect me for what one former student loved to call my “acts of outrageous integrity” (until I pushed him on his own lack of that particular virtue and he walked out in a narcissistic rage...☺). But it is this very same quality that is constantly misrepresented.

You can take any particular incident out of context, as my detractors have made an art form of doing, and of course it creates a confusing impression. But in fact, if you were made aware of the enormous amount of time, care, attention, and support that had been given to the individual; understood the complex psychological/spiritual dynamics at work; saw it in the context of a collective endeavor to create a higher ideal for the noblest of reasons; and didn’t conveniently forget that it was a freely chosen path; what may have appeared unreasonable often starts to look very different.

Contrary to the picture often painted, the students I expect the most from are not

individuals who just walked in off the street and were suddenly asked to demonstrate leaps of trust or commitment that were unreasonable to the point of being absurd. I don't work that way and never have. How could such behavior possibly serve the larger purpose I am dedicated to, which depends upon individuals' committed, autonomous, mature participation? It seems that more often than not, when students leave, there is an irresistible tendency to "rewrite history" in such a way that would justify the fact that they were choosing to walk away from that which had given their life a sense of profound meaning and purpose.

One thing that has never failed to mystify me is that so few people seem to connect the dots: If I really were the two-dimensional, sadistic, irrational megalomaniac that I have been portrayed as being, why in God's name would *anybody* stick around for ten or more years before finally "waking up"? (And if I were the person they portray me as being, anybody who did stand by me that long would surely have to be a dubious character themselves, and whatever they said should be taken with at least a few tablespoons of salt...) If I really were such a greedy, manipulating, extravagant charlatan, would I be living in a two-bedroom apartment, happily married to my wife of twenty years, and driving a ten-year-old Volvo sedan? (If only I had less integrity, what fun I could be having! ☺) If I really were such a domineering, irreproachable egomaniac, I'm sure I wouldn't have any friends and would most probably be living a miserable life surrounded by miserable people—and nothing could be further from the truth!



The fact is, I live a challenging yet truly extraordinary life. My experience is of always living on the edge of the possible, and even at times falling over that edge! The profoundly creative nature of every aspect of this fully engaged, 24/7 immersion in a living experiment in the evolution of consciousness and culture is ever-new and always thrilling. There are never enough hours in the day and there is so much more to do that holds so much promise. Life—being *alive*—means so much when you are awake. And the discovery of the evolutionary impulse super-charges every human relationship. This is the adventure that I share with everybody I come into contact with—friends, students, and colleagues; visiting teachers, scholars, philosophers, gurus, and sages; members of my jazz-fusion band; power-yoga partners; (and of course, my constant companion, my Yorkshire terrier.)

More important than anything else, for me personally, is the fact that after twenty years of hard work, my bold experiment in the evolution of enlightenment is bearing fruit like never before. I've often joked that what I'm trying to do is harder than splitting the atom, but in many ways I think it is actually true. Cultivating and creating with others an egoless field in which autonomous individuals can come together to be and create a "new being" that transcends and includes individuality is nothing short of a miracle. But it is a miracle that is beginning to occur around here on a daily basis. Not only is my student body ongoingly experiencing a surge of consciousness in the form of a shared higher state, but many men and women have finally reached that point in their own development where their conscious participation in the process is beginning to reveal new structures that up until recently had only been unmanifest potentials seen in the eye of my own mind.

I know it's not politically correct these days to say that one is doing something "new," but at the risk of offending a few more people, I really believe I am. Perhaps it is just my narcissism, but in the end, history will be my judge. I know that this will never become a mass movement, because for all the reasons I've explained, and more, it is just too demanding for

most people. But nevertheless, I am convinced that our success in transcending the ego *together*, so that a truly enlightened consciousness and culture permanently emerges and becomes stable, is inherently of profound significance for our collective future.



So this is my statement... long overdue, I know. The time has definitely come for me to come out and take a stand against those who are committed to destroying my reputation and creating doubt about my personal integrity, my students' intelligence and common sense, and the significance of the work that we have devoted our lives to. I am sure that much of what I have said here will be taken out of context and used to perpetuate the same distorted picture. I also know that some will feel I am simply adding insult to injury. But there's nothing I can do about that.

There are obviously a lot more details to go into, and some wild stories to tell, which I intend to do in a book that I will start writing as soon as I finish the teaching book I am currently working on. In the meantime, the most authentic way I can respond to any inquiries about who I really am and the nature of the work I'm doing, is to say, don't take anybody else's word for it, but come and see for yourself! Come see me at a public teaching or join me for a retreat, or you're welcome to visit my students any time at one of our many centers around the world.



I was having a conversation with a respected philosopher and very dear friend one day several years ago, and I confided in him that some of my students who had left were turning against me. I remember being surprised and deeply moved when he replied, "I know, Andrew. But they all know that you never lied to them...." And that's the bottom line.

Andrew Cohen

<http://www.andrewcohen.org/blog>