

## *Mimi Katz's responses to Yonatan Levy's questions re: Andrew Cohen & EnlightenNext*

### ***On pressure to “donate” large sums of money***

Amy Edelstein's assertion that “students are absolutely not put under pressure to give large sums of money” is totally untrue. I had to give \$8,000 before I could move to Foxhollow. That was a very large sum of money for me, and I had to go into credit card debt to pay it, but it was a relatively small amount compared to what others have had to give. It is also a blatant lie on Amy's part that it “was not common to give Andrew valuable gifts.” People often gave Andrew expensive gifts, especially clothes—and, of course, countless expensive flower arrangements.

With regard to the levying of “fines,” as Andrew's personal assistant I was privy to many instances in which people offered him large amounts of money in order to redeem themselves after some “transgression”—and not infrequently ended up giving him more than they had originally offered. The following is a direct quote from a message that Andrew had me deliver to a person who had just offered him \$10,000: “You've got to be kidding. This is not going to do the trick. Unless you can come up with something better you're not to come on the property. I'm playing hardball, for keeps.” And here is the verbatim text of another message I delivered on Andrew's behalf: “The fact is that you haven't had the generosity of spirit to give a gift of some kind to your teacher after you begged for months to be his student, and that you haven't made a similar gesture to Bob [Voss], who has spent hours and hours trying to help you to live by the Teachings. Your stingy German heart, surrounded by ferocious female pride, will never survive around here. Stop being a pig and begin to be a real human being.”

On the subject of Jane O'Neil, Andrew asked me if I thought it was okay that he had solicited the donation of the two million dollars in her trust fund for the purchase of the Foxhollow estate. I told him that in my opinion this was acceptable only if she knew that she was completely free to refuse. He then asked me to be one of the people with whom she consulted as she went through the process of making up her mind. Clearly, Jane went through a lot during this process, but after agreeing to make the donation, her biggest remaining problem was how to get the money without her family learning what she intended to do with it. When Andrew found out that in order to purchase the property he needed the funds sooner than they were scheduled to become available, Jane was again subjected to a tremendous amount of pressure, and I was again sympathetic. Michelle Hemingway (who had also been “involved” in Jane's deliberations) informed me on Andrew's behalf that I was being “too easy” on Jane, and that my attitude reflected misplaced priorities: Didn't I “care about Foxhollow?” Didn't I “care about my Teacher?” This was a terrible time for Jane. She wanted very much to please Andrew, but because she didn't want her family to know what she was doing, she had to figure out a way to get access to the funds quickly without tipping them off, and it was obvious that she felt extremely upset and pressured. An additional consideration was her desire that the donation remain a secret to the community as well—a stipulation to which Andrew agreed and then violated in a public talk in Amsterdam after Jane had left the community. I also understand that he had told some of his male students about it long before she left.

### ***Regarding EnlightenNext's “technical” denial of Andrew's involvement in a student's relationship with his daughter***

While it is technically true that Andrew didn't tell Stas and Donna's sixteen-year-old daughter directly about her mother's marital infidelities (which had occurred before she was born), he did put tremendous pressure on Stas to tell her himself. During this time, Andrew once ranted to me on the phone about how Stas *had* to tell his daughter; that she *had* to know “who her mother really was”—that if she did, she would finally stop siding with her mother

against her father; and that Stas would be “the ultimate coward” if he didn’t tell his daughter the truth. On another occasion two years prior to this episode, when Stas’ daughter was only fourteen, Andrew had me give her the following message on his behalf: “You’re a little bitch now and soon you’re going to be a big bitch—keep going, you’re doing great. Sorry if you don’t like it, but as least for once in your life someone’s telling you the truth.”

### ***Regarding Andrew’s control over the marital or sexual lives of his students***

Andrew did and undoubtedly still does play a very active role in determining who gets into a relationship with whom. I was present on several occasions when he was involved in making these kinds of decisions: “I know X wants to be with Y, but she would totally dominate him, so I think it would be better if X were with Z”—of course, X ended up with Z. I recently spoke with a couple that had left Andrew’s community within the past year, and their “how-we-got-together story” included the obligatory “asking Andrew’s permission.” As Andrew’s former personal assistant, I have direct knowledge of the fact that students were essentially required to get his permission before asking anyone to be in a relationship—if Andrew said no, that was it, they didn’t ask, and if he said yes, they did. In many cases, he would also offer “suggestions” as to whom they should ask.

### ***Regarding “confession of sins” being part of a student’s life***

Amy Edelstein asserts that the confession of sins “is and was not part of the spiritual practice of Andrew’s students.” I still have in my possession a 56-page document (!) compiled at his request by Andrew’s female students entitled, “What we have done to quell the Revolution in the last five years.” As the title suggests, it is a mass confession of all the “terrible things” that we as women had done. At Andrew’s instructions, the creation of this confessional document was undertaken *in lieu of spiritual practice* after a dinner at which he presented us with a huge graph of our “zero learning curve” over the course of the previous year. Parts of this document were later posted in the women’s sauna (about which more below).

### ***The women’s sauna***

The question about “rooms with cartoon[s] in which [students] were presented as having sabotaged Andrew, tearing his entrails and throwing his books into the fire” refers to the men’s and women’s saunas in the basement of Foxhollow. Andrew decided to use these rooms as one of the “contemporary cultural expressions” that Amy refers to—initially only for the benefit of his female students. He had one of his male students draw cartoons according to his specifications illustrating the major faults of particular women; one female student, for example, was portrayed as a dominatrix wielding a whip. Excerpts from letters written to Andrew in response to these cartoons, or to the various incidents they referred to, were blown up and posted beside them, and as the volume of the women’s “transgressions” increased, the walls of the rooms became more and more crowded with these lurid images. Some of the cartoons were horribly demeaning and degrading—believe me, NOTHING resembling an enlightened perspective of any description was to be found there—and we were forced to spend hours and even entire nights in the sauna contemplating these depictions of our contemptible female natures. I’ve since spoken to women about their experiences in the sauna and many describe having felt emotionally completely cut off—which was my experience as well—because the only way to bear it was to shut down. Some find to this day that they have deeply internalized Andrew’s view of them and are still working to rediscover the truth of their own direct experience.

Here’s a quote from a message that Andrew had me deliver to a woman who had been assigned some time in the sauna: “The reason Andrew had you come here is because he

thought you were a pig for what you said—he was outraged. You should spend time in the sauna, sleep there for seven nights, and the rest of the time you should work and remain in *moona* [silence].” I’m told that the image depicting Andrew’s physical suffering at the hands of his students, the spilling of his blood, etc., was posted in the men’s sauna, so I personally never saw it, but he often described us as having, in very graphic terms, forced him to “spill his blood.”

### ***The men’s vigil***

As a group, the male students didn’t have an easy time of it either. Their “vigil” around Andrew’s residence was neither as benign nor as voluntary as Amy describes it. I was present when someone came and told Andrew that a few of the men who had been standing there for an extended period had “wet their pants.” He laughed and laughed.

### ***Regarding Andrew’s spiritual attainment***

Andrew’s published claims suggest that he has pretty clear ideas about his own spiritual attainment in relation to well-known historical figures. Having reported that his teacher Poonja said to him that the only person he was jealous of was the Buddha, Andrew later proclaimed that he himself had surpassed Poonja. The implications of these assertions for Andrew’s estimation of his own attainment seem pretty obvious to me.

As Amy indicates, Andrew certainly does speak freely about his ex-teachers—but mostly in order to ridicule and diminish them. His grateful celebration of Poonja on his blog was particularly shocking to those of us who recognized it as a complete rewriting of the history of his deeply troubled relationship with his final teacher. I was very close to Andrew during the time he was going through what he ultimately came to decide was Poonja’s betrayal of him, and gratitude was certainly not on the list of his feelings about him. Confusion, anger, pain, disdain? Yes. Gratitude? No. I have notes from a conversation that Andrew had with an ex-student of Poonja’s who informed him of some of Poonja’s failings; he subsequently had me speak with Poonja’s current students specifically in order to pass on these revelations—the main one being that he had fathered a child out of wedlock—in an attempt to get Poonja’s students to turn against him. After Poonja died, I wrote to Andrew to express something in response what I thought he must be feeling. He told me, “That man means nothing to me now.”

### ***Some final thoughts***

What I have struggled to do since leaving Andrew’s community is to keep the whole picture in my heart—the love, intimacy and learning, all of which were indescribably powerful, as well as the betrayal and my subsequent anger. This is no small task. When the person to whom you give everything, and who you think can “free” you, turns out not to be who you thought he was, it’s very shattering. And the irony is that Andrew himself knows this experience very well: he went through the same thing with his own teacher, Poonja. Since leaving, I’ve also had to come to terms with my own part in all of this: Where is my responsibility? Why did I make the choices I made? Why did I do some of the things I did even though I knew they were wrong? And of course, Why did I stay so long? Not easy questions.

As far as I know the allegations you’ve asked about are completely credible. Amy Edelstein’s responses—and I’m quite sure Andrew must have been involved in their preparation—are sometimes blatant lies, sometimes obvious evasions, or are only technically true (e.g., that Andrew himself never told Stas’s daughter anything, etc.). None of the people I’ve spoken with, all of whom were at one point very close to Andrew, have been able to figure out how he thinks he can get away with this. I really don’t get it either.