

Andrew Cohen – his adventures with Truth

Andrew Cohen is one of the most famous spiritual teachers in the world. He sees himself as the living cutting edge of the "evolutionary enlightenment" revolution, and as a person who brings into fulfillment the maximum human potential of this era. He edits a highly popular magazine on spirituality, and his students are spread throughout the world in different centers (including one here, in Jaffa) many of his articles have been published on this site [that is, on Israel's Ma'ariv-nrg site]

Nevertheless, along the 20 years that he has been teaching quite a few complaints have surfaced from ex-students (and even from his mother), accusing him of humiliating and even exploitive treatment of them. Until now, Cohen has regularly deflected such "rumors" as being driven by malice or frustration, spread by former students who just could not face his demands. Notwithstanding that, a formal denial has never been given: Cohen has always admitted he is a tough teacher, and actually flaunted the provocations he aroused. Now this has changed.

According to an official statement that has been published recently Cohen denies that he has ever done acts that many of his former students testify to. From the large amount of testimonies contradicting his statement there is a possibility of entertaining the suspicion that Cohen and his representative are lying. But perhaps we should start this story at the beginning.

Veteran readers of this site [Ma'ariv-nrg], who surely remember the many articles by Cohen, might have asked themselves why, though he has come to Israel a number of times, an interview with him has never been held.. In fact, Yonatan Levi, who was a writer and an editor here, requested an interview with Cohen quite a few times.

Cohen's representatives agreed, but on the condition that Levi asks no questions about the allegations against Cohen, mainly those posted on the *What Enlightenment??!* blog, where a large number of Cohen's ex-students write. They explained that Cohen hasn't yet addressed these allegations in public, and so it would be out of place if he were to be asked about them. According to Levi, they promised that after Cohen addresses them, Levi would be able to ask whatever he wished.

In October 2006 Cohen indeed addressed the allegations about his conduct in a long piece in his blog titled "A Declaration of Integrity". Along praise and compliments that he generously grants himself, he mainly claims that the people who attack him simply broke under the pressure that he put them in.

Confident of obtaining an interview with Cohen, Levi made his second request. This time he was simply denied the interview outright. Seeing no other option, Levi decided to write an article about his findings without an interview. Even so, he of course sent Cohen the list of accusations he was going to write about, and requested his response. Levi added that were he to find that all the accusations false, he would not write the article at all.

In response Levi got a flat-out denial of Cohen's representatives to the accusations, and a threatening letter from Cohen's lawyer, warning him that any article would be dangerous to write. And Levi indeed didn't write.

But this whole story is now published in that same blog which Cohen feared in the beginning. And what is very obvious is that those on at least one side in this story are complete liars -- either the entire company of Cohen's ex-students who testify to his deeds, or Cohen and his organization who deny them.

I'll bring a few examples to the denied accusations. Cohen's representatives deny, for example, That Cohen ever pressured students of his to donate money to his organization. But former student, Stas Mavrides claims that after wanting to donate \$3,000 to atone for a mistake, Cohen made it was made clear to him that it would not be enough, and that he had to give more. He then "donated" \$20,000.

Susan Bridle, who was one of Cohen's magazine's editors, says she withdrew her entire retirement account and handed Cohen the \$60,000 "under severe pressure", in order for Cohen to forgive her, after she first fled his community and then regretted it.

Mimi Katz, who was Cohen's personal assistant, says she has witnessed many more cases of pressuring students in order to get money out of them, the greatest of which was the "tremendous amount of pressure" applied on Jane O'Neil, so she would give Cohen the two-million dollars needed to purchase the estate from which he now conducts his work (Foxhollow). Jane O'Neil herself also claims she was subject to great pressure.

In addition, Cohen's representatives deny that they had ever issued a "gag order or for that matter any other court order" restraining a former student from making his complaints public. But a former student named Bill Yenner published a signed contract listing this gag order. In the contract Yenner agrees not to open his mouth for five years in exchange for getting the money he "donated" to Cohen (\$80,000) back. The five years have passed.

Cohen's representatives deny he ever ordered a student of his to engage in sexual relations with prostitutes. Yonatan Levi met with a student who told him he got an order from Cohen to visit prostitutes in London and have sex with them three times each day for more than two weeks. The problem for Cohen here is that another student of his, Craig Hamilton, speaking at the time on his behalf, admitted that this happened.

Cohen's representatives deny he ever ordered students to conduct spiritual exercises in which they prostrate repeatedly in front of his picture. Different former students say that is exactly what happened, and that the whole community would prostrate this way in front of Cohen's picture every morning, sometimes doing a thousand prostrations in one session. Cohen's representatives also deny he controlled the romantic and sexual lives of his students. His ex-students report that he matched and broke-up couples according to his will.

Cohen's representatives deny he ever ordered students to give official "confessions" of their sins. Former students say he did, and one female ex-student still had her written confessions.

Cohen's representatives deny he demanded total submission to his will. Former students claim that was an explicit demand.

Well, enough. Other testimonies can be found in the statements of the students as they were sent to Yonatan Levi, and can be read here.

It is important to note that all these accusations definitely do not present Cohen as the most evil-minded guru of the New-Age (or the most original). What we are talking about here is no more than standard cultic behavior. Note also that there is nothing here that cannot be justified as a legitimate demand within the confines of an intense spiritual path.

It is just because of this that Cohen's response is interesting. Usually when spiritual teachers are accused of such behavior they simply supply the age-old excuse of having acted according to the principles of "Crazy Wisdom", a term that in this context serves as a license for the teacher to hurt the student in order to shake him awake from his blindness. But instead, Cohen uncharacteristically decided to suddenly to deny it all, and so exposed himself to the suspicion of huge dishonesty.

Why did he do that? It seems reasonable to assume that Cohen and his people tried to discourage Levi from writing, on the one hand by threatening to sue, and on the other by flatly denying all accusations (Levi did say that if he found out that nothing was true, he would not write). With a certain amount of naiveté Cohen and his representatives assume that if they insisted that nothing happened, the students' testimonies would just disappear. But now, not only the testimonies but Cohen's dubious denial has been made public. It remains to be seen how all this will affect the "evolutionary enlightenment" revolution.

In response to my request for a comment about the What Enlightenment??! blog post Cohen's representatives wrote that *"Everyone has the right to circulate their opinion on the internet. Given the internet medium [...] the truth and accuracy of information presented differs vastly from site to site for all kinds of reasons"*.

Translation of this:

<http://www.notes.co.il/tomer/55878.asp>

a slightly milder version was published here:

<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/55/ART1/886/469.html>

the first is Tomer's blog. The latter is his column on Ma'ariv's (one of Israel's national Papers) site.

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