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**Questions Submitted to Andrew Cohen or EnlightenNext
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Before responding to each question, EnlightenNext believes that it is important to describe some of the fundamental values that guide this organization and rules that EnlightenNext abides by.

First, the goal of EnlightenNext is the spiritual fulfillment of each individual who joins the organization through the process of Evolutionary Enlightenment. We are unwavering in our commitment to this principle and recognize that there are multiple paths for achieving spiritual fulfillment open to each individual. As such, EnlightenNext has always encouraged its students to be independent and be personally responsible for all their actions, because only through their own increased understanding, self-examination, and meditation can they truly achieve personal enlightenment. On occasion, students have determined that their spiritual development leads them in a different direction. Andrew Cohen respects these individuals' decision and supports them in their spiritual journey. A few disaffected ex students have initiated campaigns to discredit Andrew Cohen and EnlightenNext. Below sets the record straight.

Second, EnlightenNext has been incorporated as a 501(c)3 or charitable educational organization for many years. We take this tax-exempt status seriously and would never do anything that might jeopardize it. Our books are audited annually by an independent auditing firm, and we rely on outside legal counsel to make certain we are in compliance with the law at all times. For anyone to suggest otherwise belies a

complete lack of knowledge of EnlightenNext. We publish an annual report with audited financials which is available through our Development Department. Our filings are always available to the public from the IRS as well as online through Guidestar.org.

Q: Is it true that students are put under pressure to give large sums of money? What is the ethical justification of it? Is it true that in one case the money was given back under the condition an ex-student will sign a gag order?

A: No, students are absolutely not put under pressure to give large sums of money. That would go against everything that EnlightenNext and Andrew Cohen stand for. All donations are given freely, and the vast majority of our donations are small. Among the hundreds of donors over the 22 years since the organization was founded, there have been no more than three instances where students have left the organization for their own reasons and demanded to have their donations returned. This is after they participated to the full extent in the intellectual and spiritual life offered by EnlightenNext. No nonprofit like EnlightenNext could survive if donors could be active members over a period of time and then expect to have any donations refunded to them when they choose to move on to other paths. These donations support our daily operations, including our publications, websites, speaking tours, Foxhollow center, and staff of 40 people. We wish those who have left EnlightenNext success in their chosen path to spiritual growth but we have an obligation to the organization and to its current members, staff, and students.

To reiterate our values--our mission and goal is the spiritual evolution of each individual who joins EnlightenNext. EnlightenNext has always encouraged its members to be independent in their understanding and their pursuit of their chosen spiritual path. EnlightenNext values the support and engagement of its members and also recognizes that there are multiple paths for development open to all individuals and as such recognizes that individuals may change their chosen path after some commitment in time.

The third part of the question is absolutely untrue. There has never been a “gag order” or for that matter any other court order issued that was part of any arrangement with any student of EnlightenNext. The question implies that there was some kind of pressure on an individual that resulted in the necessity of some kind of order being issued by judge or jury but that has never been the case.

Q: Was it common, or is still common, to give Andrew valuable gifts?

A: No, it is not and was not common to give Andrew Cohen valuable gifts.

Q: Is it true that students were in the habit of paying fines of thousands of dollars as correction for things they have done? For example, for leaving Andrew?

A: No, that is not the case.

Q: a) Is it true you have described yourself as a unique teacher in regard to the liberation of women? B) Is it true Vimala Thakar criticized your treatment of women yet this criticism was concealed from the women themselves?

A: a) Yes.* (*See articles on the Next Women's Liberation published in Folio award-winning magazine *What Is Enlightenment* by bestselling feminist author Dr. Elizabeth Debold). b) No, it is absolutely not true. Vimala Thakar's correspondence about this issue, which contains many varied nuances including praise for Andrew Cohen's work and insights on women's liberation as well as critiques, was posted in full in a public area for all of Andrew Cohen's students—both women and men--to read.

Q: – Is it true you perceive your spiritual state higher than that of Ramana Maharshi, claimed that "Anyone one who loves you is promised enlightenment," and that surrender to you can destroy one's Karma?

A: No. Absolutely not. Andrew Cohen considers Ramana Maharshi a saint of the highest order. He has drawn philosophical distinctions between Vedantic Enlightenment and Evolutionary Enlightenment but those are philosophical distinctions which don't have anything to do with personal spiritual attainment. Andrew Cohen has never said he has the capacity to destroy anyone's karma. One of the fundamental principles of Evolutionary Enlightenment, and a central tenet of Andrew's teaching, is that each individual must face and take responsibility for the consequences of his or her own actions. (In Eastern traditions, the consequences of one's actions are known as one's "karma.")

Q: What is Andrew Cohen's present stance concerning "Crazy Wisdom"?

A: Please clarify what is being referred to by the term "crazy wisdom" to ensure that we have a clear and common definition of the term.

Q: How is the induction of "healthy shame" useful in enlightening people and freeing them from personal drama?

A: Traditional religions foster moral development through various teachings that promote conscience or healthy shame. For example, Catholics rely on the practice of Confession, Jews pray for Atonement on the holy day of Yom Kippur, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims all have various practices devoted to cultivating a sense of conscience in their adherents. Andrew Cohen firmly believes that developing conscience is an important aspect of spiritual life. Conscience, or healthy shame, as he has on occasion referred to it, is when an individual sees and understands the effects of their negative actions and feels healthy remorse about suffering they have caused to others as a result of their own selfishness, greed, or irresponsibility.

Q: Does Andrew find himself partially or wholly responsible of the sudden decline of Caroline Franklin's health, leading to her death?

A: No, absolutely not. This suggestion flies in the face of the facts. Andrew Cohen was deeply saddened by Caroline Franklin's death. Caroline Franklin was a frail older woman who had survived the brutality of the Nazi regime in WWII. Great care was always taken throughout her association with EnlightenNext to accommodate her physical condition while also allowing her to learn from and benefit from its programs. When her health took a sudden decline several of her closest friends from the EnlightenNext center in London traveled over an hour to see her. Her passing was unexpected and was mourned by her friends. Andrew was unaware of her rapidly declining health, as at that time he was elsewhere in the world. Had he heard he certainly would have contacted her as he feels strongly about his obligation as a spiritual guide to support all his students.

Q: Is Jane O'Neill lying when she says that she was pressured to give a 2-million-dollar donation to Andrew? Is she lying when she says that Andrew has violated his promise to her to keep the donation secret?

A: Ms. O'Neill gave her donation freely of her own accord. To do otherwise would violate the very foundations of EnlightenNext's philosophy and teaching. Ms. O'Neill had been closely involved with EnlightenNext for some years, had graciously contributed at various times, and was involved in its search for a center. Her offer of support was in keeping with her spirit of generosity and EnlightenNext continues to appreciate her gifts. The only persons who knew of the donation were a small group of individuals who were charged with the senior management of EnlightenNext and they neither spread nor published the information. Her donation became common knowledge through her own disclosure to friends, colleagues, family, and eventually on the internet. Ms. O'Neill was a close student for some time and a friend to many at EnlightenNext. We still have warm feelings towards her and greatly appreciate what her generosity made possible. EnlightenNext wishes her well and hopes she has continued success in her chosen path.

Q: Is it true, that a student who took an oath to refrain from sexual acts but admitted to have masturbated, afterwards took a loan equal to money he was expected to inherit and donated it?

A: No. Absolutely not.

Q: Is it true that a student was sent to visit prostitutes daily for 3 weeks against his will?

A: No, that is absolutely not true.

Q: Is it true that part of the spiritual practice that Andrew's students did included prostrations before his pictures?

A: In Hindu, Tibetan, and other Buddhist traditions it is customary to do a spiritual practice of prostrations. It is common in these religions, which have millions of contemporary adherents, to have pictures of one's spiritual mentors in the spiritual practice room. In the early years of EnlightenNext, there were many students who had followed Hindu or Buddhist paths and had done this type of practice before they became part of EnlightenNext. In similar fashion, starting in 1992, for a period of about five years, some students did place photos in their spiritual practice rooms. Andrew himself never advised or recommended using photographs as part of a prostration practice. EnlightenNext has grown and evolved over time, changing its practices to accommodate new members and focus. This particular aspect of practice has not occurred for many years.

Q: Is it true what Stas (Ernest) Mavrides said, that Andrew revealed to Stas' daughter intimate details about her mother?

A: No, Andrew never told Stas Ernest Mavrides' daughter information about her mother's intimate life.

Q: Did Andrew use to determine when his students could engage in sexual relationship, and when they could not?

A: No, Andrew did not determine for his students. Andrew's students are always encouraged to be independent and responsible in all areas of life. As a spiritual mentor, Andrew would advise his close male and female students in these matters, just as a Rabbi, Priest, Swami, or Buddhist teacher would guide their parishioners in questions regarding marriage or relationship issues.

All spiritual traditions emphasize that sexuality is a fundamental aspect of human life and takes commitment to understand. Andrew has counseled his students to pay attention in this area of life. For example, on one occasion in the late 1990s, Andrew, together with several close male students, each took up a six month period of abstinence to look into the nature of sexual desire. From 1998 to approximately 2001, there was a small group of ten or fifteen close students voluntarily choose to engage more deeply with Evolutionary Enlightenment and to develop their understanding of the sexual drive and the various cultural conditioning surrounding it. Andrew would discuss and advise these particular students more closely on this subject.

An important aspect of the values and principles of EnlightenNext are that sexual relationships between adults are committed and foster respect, peace, and supportive companionship between the partners. There are many married couples at EnlightenNext, and their camaraderie, equality, and partnership is an inspiring example in our postmodern cultural climate. Andrew has published and spoken publicly about the principles that support wholesome relationships of harmony and respect. His teachings on relationship and sexuality can be easily found on at ["Happy Endings"](#) and [What Is the Relationship Between Sex & Spirituality](#).

Q: Were students asked to shave their heads?

A: Yes, in the early years, around 1992, for a few years, some students shaved their heads as one part of a greater spiritual practice of renunciation, similar to common Buddhist or Hindu spiritual customs. This is no longer the practice and hasn't been for about ten years. Between 1992-1998, some students elected to take vows of celibacy for specific periods of time and as an external sign of this powerful practice of inward renunciation and spiritual commitment--following the tradition of Buddhist and Hindu monks and nuns—these celibate students would shave their heads twice a month. Now some students voluntarily take vows of celibacy for a limited period of time but no longer shave their heads as part of this time-honored practice.

Q: Was confessions of sins large part of the spiritual practice of Andrew's students?

A: No, this concept is and was not part of the spiritual practice of Andrew's students.

Q: Did Andrew ever emphasize the need to absolutely surrender to him?

A: No.

Andrew has always and continues to emphasize individual responsibility for one's own spiritual intention, development, and progress. While individuals can have powerful spiritual openings with teachers, as occurred in Andrew's own case, he has always drawn important distinctions between an inner opening that can serve as a spiritual catalyst and the need for an individual to follow through on their own recognition in order to further their own development. Over the last two decades, Andrew has extensively explored the role of a spiritual teacher or Guru in our post-modern cultural age. As part of his understanding, he has pioneered the notion of what he refers to as the Guru Principle, which he speaks about as being embodied by a collective of individuals who share the same highest aspirations. He has discussed the function of the Guru Principle in detail in public teachings, in his published *Guru/Pandit* dialogues with evolutionary philosopher Ken Wilber in *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, and in his book *In Defense of the Guru Principle*.

Q: Luna Tarlo's book quotes Andrew is saying – "anyone who loves me is promised enlightenment." As far as you know, did he say these things and did he say similar things?

A: No. Andrew never made statements like that promising enlightenment. Luna Tarlo told Andrew that she fictionalized aspects of her book for dramatic effect.

While Andrew never issued any kind of promises like that, it's worthy to note that given his own spiritual path which included association with various spiritual

teachers, when he first began teaching in 1986 he would often speak about the profound and illuminating experiences a student can have when they meet a spiritual teacher. At the same time, Andrew always emphasized the importance of individual choice and volition, and the need to act with integrity. He has never and does not now teach that anything can free one from having to take individual responsibility for one's own life and for the effects of one's actions. His focus on this type of spiritual experience shifted significantly soon after he started teaching as he quickly found that students benefit most when they understand the science and mechanics of evolution, the complexity of human development, and become more facile working with a perspective rather than focusing on spiritual experiences themselves.

Q: Did students used to sit in rooms with cartoon in which they were presented as having sabotaged Andrew, tearing his entrails and throwing his books into the fire?

A: Andrew has always been an innovative teacher, using all kinds of contemporary cultural expressions to help illuminate to his students ways in which individuals can support or derail their own higher aspirations. One such example, for a few years in the late 1990's, was the use of simple pictures of the postmodern egoic relationship to spiritual life, created by Andrew's long-term students for their personal use. Alongside these pictures were reflections written by these close students describing the enlightened perspective and the un-enlightened perspective through their own experience, as well as spiritually inspiring and illuminating quotes from spiritual masters. This area served as a focus of contemplation on the mechanics of the parts of the Self (ego, Authentic Self, and choosing faculty), on cultural and gender conditioning, and on the values of the postmodern age. For many, this served as a powerful teaching tool, providing insight and objective understanding.

Q: Is it true that there was a circle of men who were required to stand around Andrew's house for two days without moving?

A: No, the statement that a circle of men were required to stand around Andrew Cohen's house for two days without moving is not true. Students of Andrew Cohen were never required to stand anywhere, without moving, ever. In the summer of 2001, there was a group of male students who did a day and a half spiritual vigil in the grassy yard near Andrew Cohen's house. They were served meals and were free to come and go, and went inside at night to sleep. It is not uncommon for meditators to assume a position of contemplation for a period of time as part of a spiritual practice, discipline, and desire to know.

Q: As someone who began teaching soon after meeting your teacher, you have never gone the hardships you require from your students. What makes you sure of their effectiveness?

A: Andrew was on a committed spiritual path for a decade before he began teaching. Over that time he worked with several teachers and underwent numerous

tests and hardships as a student. He freely speaks about his experiences and of what he learned about the spiritual path from it.

Q: Has the "Whatenlightenment" blog made you more careful or reflective as to your methods or means of teaching?

A: EnlightenNext has been growing, particularly in the last few years, during which the “whatenlightenment” blog was published. We have an email list of 70,000+, and over 10,000 worldwide “evolutionaries,” members of our network. And we continue to develop an ever-growing network of friends and colleagues committed to the evolution of consciousness and culture through the publication of Folio award-winning *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine and through our weekly EnlightenNext webcast with its Honorary Practitioners, distinguished individuals from various fields who serve as educators and advisors.

EnlightenNext and Andrew Cohen are becoming better known, and there is more publicity in many ways. We now have many more students teaching, writing, and speaking in conferences, seminars, and other public events about what the path and practice of Evolutionary Enlightenment is, about our inquiry into the evolution of culture, and what life is like as a committed student of Andrew Cohen. As we grow, and as we have more and more engagement with others who are doing similar work in the culture, we continue to appreciate the perspective from our associates, colleagues, friends, and professional advisors, and the objectivity they generously provide on how best we can accomplish our work and mission. Numerous former students also continue to offer valuable input, advice, and support but the blog referred to is primarily designed by a few disgruntled students who do not support our work and do not wish us to grow in positive ways. We have always had an open door policy to our centers and teachings, and we continue to look for new and better ways to communicate more about this perspective on spiritual and cultural development and the results of our work.

Links:

General Links:

www.enlightennext.org

www.andrewcohen.org

www.wie.org

From Andrew Cohen about the Guru Principle and the Development of His Students & EnlightenNext

- [A Declaration of Integrity](#)

- [The Guru & Pandit](#), 20 dialogues with Ken Wilber & Andrew Cohen on the evolution of enlightenment and various emergences and challenges in Andrew Cohen's teaching work
- [In Defense of the Guru Principle](#)
- [An Unconditional Relationship to Life](#)

From Andrew Cohen's Students

- [A Matter of Integrity](#), by Carter Phipps
- [Boomeritis: More than a Book Review](#), by Elizabeth Debold
- On [The New Women's Liberation](#), by Elizabeth Debold and others

About EnlightenNext, Evolutionary Enlightenment, and the Growing Movement of "Evolutionaries"

[Weekly Webcast Discussion, Global Events, Centers](#)