

EnlightenNext Revisited: An Attempt to Understand the Complexity and Contradictions of a Utopian Experiment

By Mary Adams

Preface

There are many philosophical, spiritual, and ethical questions being explored and debated since Andrew Cohen stepped down as a spiritual teacher in July 2013 and EnlightenNext dissolved as a global organization. The significance of this was, and is far-reaching, with implications not only for EnlightenNext and its community but also for the modern spiritual world at large.

As a spiritual teacher, from the very beginning, Andrew attracted controversy. When he emerged onto the western spiritual scene in 1986, young, passionate and with a powerful transmission of enlightened consciousness, his countenance was fiercely vulnerable and confident, yet humble and human simultaneously. The Love that animated his conviction that awakened consciousness was and is our Nature, and entirely realizable here and now even for our postmodern psychologized Western minds, injected a radical tangibility. This was both applauded and reviled. In its freshness and potency, cynicism and ‘time’ were swept away. Profoundly compelling in its resonance, this message resulted in hundreds of lives being turned upside down within the first few years of Andrew’s teaching. Lit up with the same awakened passion and clarity and driven by the possibility of creating an awakened culture *together*, many of us voluntarily gave up our existing lives and joined Andrew in his utopian vision. His conviction, borne of a profound awakening to the Absolute, led to almost three decades of highly committed spiritual work by hundreds of people. That this conviction would also end up having the double edge of a dangerous hubris resulting in destruction and cynicism, is the enormous paradox many of us feel we are left holding: two almost irreconcilable truths.

This essay is comprised of a series of posts written over the past year and a half. It is an attempt to explore the complexity of factors involved, and most of all to acknowledge the commitment and spiritual courage of *every* person who gave everything of themselves and of their lives, at whatever point in time, from the very beginning right through to the end for a utopian vision. It is also, my response and reflections as a former senior student and teacher at EnlightenNext, on the twenty-seven years I was involved with Andrew and the many questions addressed to me personally about EnlightenNext’s history, our work, and what led to the relinquishment of Andrew’s leadership and the subsequent collapse of a global

organization. In this I attempt to explore some of the issues and specific questions that have been raised in the many discussions that have burgeoned on the internet or taken place in-person, since this happened. These responses and reflections do not represent a comprehensive exploration of any one of the issues involved but are part of an ongoing exploration into the complexity regarding Andrew as a spiritual teacher and EnlightenNext as the organization and global community of students that supported and developed his vision and work for years. It is written from the perspective of someone who was involved throughout in very diverse capacities. Personally, given that over half of my adult life has been spent with Andrew as my teacher, including my involvement with EnlightenNext's mission either directly or indirectly, from its inception as an organization, it has been and is important for myself and for what I believe to be EnlightenNext's legacy, to try to understand the multi-dimensional phenomenon that affected so many lives.

The period following this crisis has been a turbulent time in many ways but also one of deeper reflection and understanding. Having met and spoken with many people who have been involved at various periods of EnlightenNext's history; people with very similar and also very different stories and views to my own, I have come to appreciate the diverse and painfully contradictory sides to this story - from the devastating to the sublime. The humbling complexity of it all, the intensity and scale of the human experience involved, has been and is challenging to embrace.

In these posts, although I have touched on it, I have not attempted to go into the work we did as women together nor Andrew's relationship to women, as this is a topic in itself. Nor have I gone into depth into the collective work that we were involved in. This is also a topic to itself. This collection of posts is more a continuing exploration of the factors that have brought us (those of us involved with Andrew or EnlightenNext at *whatever* period) to the present, the understanding of which I appreciate is an ongoing process with multiple angles; one that is critical for an integrated future.

Although EnlightenNext and the community of students involved went through many phases and changes, I have come to realize that radical change had to happen. Given the entrenched state of its culture, the resistance to change within Andrew as leader, and as I have come to see it, the denial of so much of the darker aspects of our history and the effects on so many lives, nothing less than a dramatic disruption in the end was going to enable this to be freed. As a result, for myself and many others, a fuller picture of Andrew as a teacher and EnlightenNext – its work and its legacy— is emerging, encompassing the darkness of its shadows as well as its achievement, laid bare alongside each other.

A Brief Breakdown of the Structure

This is long document, more akin to a short book, although not a book. As mentioned, it is comprised of a series of posts written over months, part of an enquiry that is continuing in multiple forums. It is not a chronological account of EnlightenNext's history, nor is it a detailed account of my personal story. But it is my attempt, as mentioned, to understand my story/ the journey so many of us have been involved in for the past three decades.

There are four sections to this essay, each with a number of separate posts. Each post can be read as an entity in itself on a specific topic, but the range of often contradictory experiences and reflections can only be found in reading the whole.

The largest single challenge has been how to make sense within myself of the complexity of extreme contradictions that have made up this journey, especially those expressed through Andrew Cohen, who as guru or teacher, touched so many of us so deeply. This has been, and is a big part of the journey for myself. In some posts, I have used personal stories to illustrate some of the questions and issues that I, and many others, were /are grappling with. Most of the larger questions are left open. They are not abstract, but borne of our actual experience.

Section One is simply on the dissolution in 2013. It is a brief account of the diversity of reactions and responses that I became aware of from being in the center of this crisis at the time. This includes my own responses and position then, which have altered considerably over these past two years.

Section Two is the longest section. It is an attempt to look beneath the events that were the tipping point at the time, and at what I see now as some of the deeper "fault lines".

Section Three is why I stayed at EnlightenNext given the extreme polarities that have emerged with regard to its history and Andrew's tenure as a spiritual teacher. For those involved more recently in EnlightenNext's programs, retreats etc or who were not formal students, much is unknown of what our actual life was like. I have attempted to give, through my own experience, glimpses into the life we lived – the challenges and discoveries of this – and what kept my heart and soul involved for twenty -seven years.

Section Four, on the question of EnlightenNext's legacy, is the shortest section. This does require a reading of the content and context of the previous three sections to have any meaning. The question of legacy is clearly open to debate as reflected in

the spectrum of views that exist globally with regard to both Andrew and EnlightenNext.

The issues explored in this essay are part of a larger stream of enquiry. Our story is similar to others. My hope is that in spite of the divisiveness that is part of Andrew's and EnlightenNext's legacy we can continue to take steps to end this division, one that has plagued other spiritual communities who have undergone a similar crisis, through mutual understanding and respect for our differences - respect for our shared humanity.

Introduction

For those who don't know me, I met Andrew Cohen in 1986, having spent twelve years prior to this as a seeker and spiritual practitioner, including many years in India. My initial passion in pursuing core spiritual and philosophical questions was kindled as a teenager by the explosive cultural questioning of the late sixties and seventies. This led me initially to study South Asian philosophy and language at university in Australia before going on to India. Although this period was largely one of withdrawal, the relationship between Spirit (Being-Intelligence) and Life itself in all its diversity became, and still is, a life passion.

In fact it was Andrew's vision for an awakened collective and the relevance of spiritual principles and values for the world that drew me to him as a teacher. His clarity and passion inspired a rare commitment to a utopian possibility in hundreds of us from around the globe; and EnlightenNext ¹ (in all its various incarnations) was a radical experiment in attempting to actualize this. It was also a contemporary response to the enduring spiritual question at the heart of human existence: that of the relationship between "the One and the Many", prior Unity and diversity (or in theological terms - god and his/her manifestation as the universe). This is what inspired so many of us and was at the heart of our work with Andrew.

From the perspective of someone who was senior within EnlightenNext, actively involved in running and teaching its educational programs and retreats right to the end, and as someone who, like so many, spent years ostracized then 'exiled' to the periphery of the EnlightenNext community, I witnessed and was part of the jagged unfolding process - the many stages that Andrew, as a spiritual teacher, and EnlightenNext, went through over twenty-seven years in the course our work together.

¹ I have used the term "EnlightenNext" to refer to both the organization and the global network of students involved from the very beginning. Where I am referring specifically to EnlightenNext Inc. (the non-profit, based in Massachusetts) I refer to it as EnlightenNext organization.

Some of the elements in Andrew's and EnlightenNext's fall are not exclusive to EnlightenNext. Abuse of power in different forms has plagued spiritual paths and teachers, especially those in the west, for the past fifty plus years. That this is continuing to this day, leaving in its wake a trail of cynicism and mistrust in an already materialistic culture, is a tragedy. I have come to deeply appreciate the open enquiry taken up by former students of Andrew (recent and long past) - the commitment to understanding what happened, and where possible, to reconciliation and integration.

Section 1: Dissolution

Diverse Impacts and Responses

What happened with EnlightenNext and Andrew's sudden eclipse as a spiritual teacher after twenty-seven years was almost unthinkable prior to it actually happening. Given the arc of time involved, inevitably this has had wide-ranging and *diverse* impacts at every level, especially for its student body, both past and existing at the time.

Foxhollow, July 2013: For many of us actively involved as students in 2013, the eruption and rapid dissolution of EnlightenNext as a global institution and network created fissures within the structure and beyond that tore at soul relationships, the interior fabric of EnlightenNext itself; relationships that had been forged over decades of intensely focused, shared spiritual life and work. This was a heart-wrenching time, which created great instability that no doubt rippled outwards, contributing to the general sense of chaos felt across the globe. There were attempts to stem this, to try to mitigate that chaos and create some kind of transition, but forces were unleashed that proved to be too big for this. Something much larger than any of us, I believe, was set in motion that had its own agenda and its own karmic momentum.

As events unfolded in wild and rapid succession and the structure began to come apart, coherent communication broke down. Rumors and counter rumors flew through cyberspace as people tried to make sense of what was happening. Looking back at this time, although a series of factors came together, ultimately I believe it was the crisis in the breakdown of trust in Andrew, primarily with his more senior students, that created a tipping point and proved to be a catalyzing factor for a much deeper eruption. As sudden as this appeared to be, it came after years of wave after wave of isolated voices from both outside and within and the organization and student body, women and men attempting to bring about change from within,

ideally in collaboration with Andrew. Change that many of us believed could happen in line with depth of experience, maturity and autonomy of those throughout the student body. This, as events have shown, proved to be unachievable, reaching a critical impasse primarily due to Andrew's lack of trust, his tenacious adherence to a pyramid power structure and his own position in it.

It was also largely due, I believe, to the rigidity of the top-down structure as a whole which for too long had deprived many of its core people of a sense of shared ownership, respect, and a real voice in determining EnlightenNext's future.² In the spring of 2013 however, I don't think any of us anticipated, nor intended the extent or speed with which things unraveled. This in itself points to the existence of deeper fault lines. Shadows rapidly came to the surface when the structure that had held things together for so long, and created so much, was pushed to breaking point, and finally broke apart.

Many women and men committed to EnlightenNext's vision and work for years, either as students, practitioners, staff, supporters, fundraisers, donors, volunteers, or all of the above, understandably found the regrettable absence of leadership from Andrew, the lack of coherence within the core structure all the way to the top, to be severely disillusioning. For some this went so deep that confidence in the Utopian/Spiritual Impulse itself was almost, if not, destroyed. This was heartbreaking as up to this point, through all the iterations of darkness and light experienced within EnlightenNext since the first 'teaching' in 1986 in a small cottage in south England, this had remained irrepressibly alive, the guiding north star.

The Global Network of Practitioners: In the midst of this storm, the small team of those of us at Foxhollow who had built up a dynamic global Education program³ over some years, were receiving concerned emails from a very different population. These were largely people for whom this crisis was utterly confusing – the hundreds of men and women from all walks of life who had either recently been introduced to the work of EnlightenNext, or who had been engaged over the previous ten years positively and meaningfully in a global network of education programs, retreats and/or innovative local activities. A proportion of these were students, the majority not.

The few occasions I was outside Foxhollow in the final months when we were closing down the main EnlightenNext centre there, I was approached by people, some of whom I barely knew personally, who were shattered by the news. They spoke of having found something sacred and authentic that made sense of and

² See section on Top-down Structure, and Changes

³ See note 56 on page 49 re Education

brought deeper meaning and purpose to their lives. This was, and is, deeply troubling, and continues to be a cosmically unjust consequence for those who had nothing to do with Andrew's shadows or EnlightenNext's history. These events were equally confusing to the independent professional organizations and individuals outside of EnlightenNext circles, who were engaged in collaborative cultural projects with various national centers globally. For them the news they were hearing of the upheaval and possible dissolution of EnlightenNext as a global organization, was disturbing.

Former Students: However for those who had left EnlightenNext many years before July 2013, women and men who suffered grievances and moral injuries that had long gone unacknowledged or addressed by either Andrew or EnlightenNext, it was a very different experience. As shocking and unexpected as these events were, from all accounts they clarified and confirmed the reality behind the terrible burden of unresolved anger, trauma, and in some cases crippling self-doubt, that had been carried for years. Andrew's admission of culpability with regard to his own ego was in fact vindicating. The obvious implications that his own self-serving motives and shadows contributed to, if not caused, negative outcomes - broke open the prison of negative self-image and sense of spiritual failure many were still trapped in. For others it confirmed their experience of moral grievance and/or righteous independence, even in the midst of renewed emotional upheaval.

As the WN site⁴ has borne witness to, these events opened up a space for the tsunami of emotions, experiences and abuses of the past to be heard, where before they haven't, generating afresh a wider inquiry into our (EnlightenNext's) history. Questions about the indefensible events and painful facts that had been previously ignored within EnlightenNext, but which clearly needed to be faced and resolved where possible, re-surfaced in full light of Andrew's admission of fallibility. This, along with the repercussions of his stepping down from the leadership position he held for almost three decades, has implicated many of us, not only Andrew, in a deep and soul searching enquiry that is ongoing.

My Own Response in 2013: Personally, both the circumstances and the magnitude of the effects of this crisis were shattering at the time. I could never have imagined prior to it happening, the scope of the implosion of EnlightenNext, the break-up of its community, or Andrew's incapacity for leadership in the face of this.

Although I was aware of the serious issues we were facing as an organization especially with regard to Andrew's leadership, initially I was defensive of what I saw as the result of years (twenty-seven of them) of so many people's Love,

⁴ Private site established by former students post EnlightenNext organization's closure

commitment, and intensive spiritual work being swept away on a tidal wave of cynicism and negativity. My response was ‘protective’, if not defiant, of what I considered precious and hard won.

Foxhollow felt like ground zero in a ‘war’ with all the elements of being under ‘attack’, of betrayal, misrepresentation, destruction, loss, grief, etc. The years of training to not contract and separate, to not harden around the volatile emotions passing through and around me, no matter how ‘justified’ they seemed, was severely tested. At times I felt a breath away from being subsumed in grief or anger, teetering on the edge of destructive divisiveness; a position I knew, once ‘set in’ is challenging to come back from. I appreciate the friendship of those who helped me (from within and outside of EnlightenNext) during those months. It was a time of extremely challenging decisions all round. In a sense we were each alone in our decisions, and yet so many people’s lives were affected across the globe, including those of the local (non-student) EnlightenNext staff and their families⁵.

However when the ‘dust’ finally settled, it was clear to me that deeper forces were at work than appeared on the surface of things. For EnlightenNext, a ‘world’ that touched countless people’s lives globally, to have been razed so decisively, things could not have been simply the way I perceived and believed them to be. Despite the positive development and changes that had taken place within EnlightenNext over years, something was clearly very wrong. At the same time, the deepest dimensions of our life and work together over twenty-seven years were undeniably alive in my experience in the midst of the inner and outer shatteredness.

In December 2013 the doors of Foxhollow were effectively closed and the artifacts of almost three decades of our life and work together were given away to other institutions, sold off or burned.

A Year of Conversations: Following the closure of Foxhollow, I travelled to India. The twelve weeks I spent there helped open up a space within myself to begin to question my own assumptions and look afresh at the complexity involved in EnlightenNext’s history, Andrew’s spiritual leadership, my own involvement, and the implications of all this for the teachings and work that had been the centre of my own and so many people’s lives.

By 2013 the “teachings” had long since ceased to simply be the revelations of a single powerfully awakened mind, but were the expression of an ongoing process of

⁵ There were six non-student local staff members working full-time for EnlightenNext Inc. at the time, all of who lost their jobs in the aftermath. This also affected local trades people who had regularly serviced or supplied Foxhollow in multiple ways for years.

enquiry based on the experience and work over years of hundreds of women and men infused with that revelation.

Post India, I began having what grew into a series of conversations and meetings with men and women both recently and formerly involved with EnlightenNext, many of whom I had not spoken with for years and some of whom I had shared intimately some of the most extreme and formative years of EnlightenNext. From these shattering, and often poignant conversations with people whom I had regarded as having ‘left’ for another life, or even worse, ‘abandoned’ the life and vision we shared, I’ve come to appreciate how *wrong* I was, and how much more there is to each person’s story. Many of them have reflected to me aspects of EnlightenNext and their own experience that I either was not aware of, or for various reasons, had not deeply considered.

There are obviously hundreds of different kinds of ‘stories’ but these conversations opened up a deeper window for myself into the powerful and subtle dynamics involved in the teacher-student relationship and the spiritual life itself, including the enormous repercussions when this fails. Listening to and sharing different experiences and reactions people have had to the time they spent with Andrew, to EnlightenNext, and more recently to its implosion, has revealed some of the scope of what this relationship was, what it meant, and its ongoing legacy.⁶

Within spiritual communities, it’s not uncommon for some individuals to choose to leave the path or the teacher for various reasons. But this occurred in EnlightenNext on a huge scale for a period of many years. It was always disturbing and painful, as if the tapestry of our shared being was being torn, but in line with the culture we created at EnlightenNext, I found ways to rationalize this. This has had enormous repercussions, which I deeply regret.

In speaking with a close friend who was one of the first to be told to leave by Andrew, he conveyed to me the traumatic effects of this, and of Andrew’s and the community’s response, on him at a soul level⁷. Through similar conversations with former students, friends whom in the past I shared so much of my own life and heart with, I have come to appreciate the many years of courageous inner work involved to get beyond the existential rupture that occurred in their relationship with Andrew as their spiritual teacher – and for some, the traumatic effects of their experience within the EnlightenNext community that ultimately resulting in their leaving.

⁶ Explored further in The Guru-Student relationship and Love, Power and Abuse

⁷ See sections on Love and Abuse, and Leaving

Core Students: Another significant response in 2013 which came from within the core student body at the time – women and men actively involved in the organization for upward of ten or so years - was the rapid termination of their formal relationship with Andrew as their spiritual teacher. For someone who evoked such intense loyalty, this was a shocking phenomenon. As events have unfolded it's become clear that Andrew's admission of the role he played in creating a crisis of such proportions invoked a deep anger, grief, and in some cases, sense of betrayal amongst many of his students at the time. This was not only because Andrew portrayed himself consistently as someone who had mastery of his ego, but also because of the rigorous stand he always took with us, his students. This was especially so with regard to the cultivation of humility and *caring* for the 'whole'. His unwavering admonition that we give priority to the good of the whole over the neuroses and insecurities of our egos was the backbone of his teaching. And as many know, he relentlessly enforced this message.

From the very early years our love for Andrew as our teacher and our passion for a vision for humanity beyond our individual selves, meant that years of spiritual practice and enquiry were devoted to cultivating self-awareness, and a sensitivity and Care for that utopian goal we shared. This demanded a significant degree of self-sacrifice and trust, plus a willingness to see our self-concern and/or personal ambitions objectively (a hefty challenge in itself!). Andrew's failure to respond to his own crisis of leadership and to face his own human shortcomings i.e. to embody his own teachings when it was called for and most needed, was shocking and profoundly disturbing for many students who had given ten to fifteen years of their lives to creating a micro-culture based on these values. As it was for former students, the result of this was shattered idealism. In an outpouring of anger and anguish expressed directly to Andrew at this time, one young male student clearly conveyed this, "I thought we were in this *together*".

In some cases mistrust quickly followed, not just of Andrew but also of the structures he had created. And as trust began to dissolve, with it went the delicate interior infrastructure we had painstakingly built and shared together for years. For some individuals there is to this day regret for the years of personal sacrifice, invested energy, and money generously given.⁸ Personally, I have found this enormously painful, understandable, and the circumstances that have evoked this, deeply regrettable. This obviously stands in irreconcilable contrast to what EnlightenNext stood for; to what originally drew us all to take up such an

⁸ At this point, after two years, many have moved on, putting behind them broken trust and disillusionment, bringing the depth of their experience and its lessons to bear on their own natural talents in creative endeavors.

unconventional life, and to what, for many, still continues to be an indisputably positive and profound influence on the lives they are living, today.⁹

How can these two realities co-exist? How could Andrew have expressed such liberated Heart and vision, such a prescient knowledge of the human psyche and the spiritual laws to liberate it, and yet been so bereft of this knowledge with regard to himself? How could twenty- seven years represent such extremely opposing consequences? These questions, and their implications, are amongst those many of us have been and are engaging in. They also point to the deeper conflicting truths underlying Andrew's role as a teacher and EnlightenNext's past.

The challenge to make room for conflicting truths without one necessarily canceling out the other, and the intensity of emotions each can invoke in any of us, is humbling. As volatile as this has been at times, and still can be, there does seem to be the possibility emerging of some kind of integration of the *entirety* of our history as divisions crumble and communication opens up.

Section 2: Deep Fault Lines

Transparency

There has understandably been at times much speculation and finger-pointing around the implosion of EnlightenNext. Within the spectrum of responses, there are those who are angry that EnlightenNext folded, that we didn't succeed in bringing about the necessary changes from within. However, contrary to what some believe, despite the challenges within the organization, the rigid structures, and Andrew's leadership, the extent and speed of the breakdown and disbanding of EnlightenNext at a global level was, as stated previously, unanticipated and, I believe, unintended at the time.

With regard to this, the question of transparency, or lack of it, is very valid. There remain strongly differing viewpoints on this issue. Those holding a more traditional standpoint feel that the public 'airing' of challenges with regard to the guru's leadership and/or the internal dynamics of his/her organization, is inherently destabilizing and should be kept strictly within the organization and those involved more closely. There are others who regard the lack of transparent communication with the wider circles of the EnlightenNext student body, especially concerning

⁹ For many practitioners and students who became engaged with EnlightenNext in the last decade, the changes that had ensued meant that their experience was very different to earlier stages of EnlightenNext's history.

major challenges within EnlightenNext, is what led to the irreversible momentum of events. My own view is that both are true with regard to EnlightenNext, and that there are different levels of transparency. The issue of a lack of cultural transparency and the freedom to question – tenets that are foundational in any mature organization – is critical I now believe to what played out over years.

Lack of Transparency and Self-questioning: In addition to the immediate centrality of Andrew’s role as guru and head of the organization, to me, in retrospect, a big part of what undermined EnlightenNext as a global organization, was the profound lack of integration and transparency that developed at its heart: – the absence over years, of healthy self-questioning with regard to mistakes, dysfunction, and real shadows in our history. Within the unconventional world of the spiritual journey under the guidance of a teacher, especially in the context of creating a spiritual community, the need for cultural self-transparency seems obvious. This would seem even more so in the case of Andrew and EnlightenNext where there was an absence of both a spiritual lineage and/or a senior spiritual mentor. Andrew, having severed his relationship with his own guru early on in his teaching career, had neither the support nor the oversight these provide.¹⁰

Despite the books and blogs written by former students as well as questions voiced by individuals and small groups of students at different periods within EnlightenNext, there was an unspoken moratorium for many years on seriously questioning either Andrew or the culture we were living in. At no time, until the very last few years amongst Andrew’s more senior students, was there a forum or environment that supported serious cultural *self-questioning* within EnlightenNext, especially when challenges arose. Nor was there an environment conducive to appropriate questioning of Andrew’s authority on significant issues, again, until this was broken through at a senior level in the latter years. One reason for this is that it was very challenging to do, often with punitive repercussions. Critiques of Andrew by students were mostly interpreted as acts of “ego” often resulting in a crisis with Andrew. This could lead to one being ‘demoted’ to menial tasks, temporarily expelled, or being fired from EnlightenNext staff. More significant than purely fear of repercussions was, I believe, the nature of the Guru-student relationship.¹¹ Thus, from early years important questions and critiques were forced to surface outside the organization and were for the most part viewed as ‘attacks’ on what we were doing. Since the early days in Devon, England, critiques of Andrew and his teachings were invariably regarded as misperceived and lacking in appreciation of the spiritual radicalism he embodied. No doubt in some cases this was true. Andrew was ‘rocking the boat’ in a profound way. But these criticisms

¹⁰ This is further explored in *The Absence of Lineage*

¹¹ See section on Guru-student relationship

included those of spiritual peers or teachers much his senior. As time went on and a community formed, this tendency toward non self-questioning became a pattern, especially as Andrew's confidence and authority grew stronger, and his and our work began to be recognized.

Looking back, there were few substantial attempts at any point from within EnlightenNext until latter years, to re-examine or integrate challenging aspects of our life, or what became seen as our 'past'. The fact that well over a hundred students left; that many of the early pioneering students who had literally given up everything to join Andrew in his vision for creating a collective utopia were no longer around; that disturbing accounts had been published in books and on blogs; and that these matters were not openly discussed, points to the degree of our collective adherence to a single and compelling narrative, one that largely came from Andrew; one that rationalized our 'world'. Namely, that we were on a radical but essentially 'good and right' path for a higher cause; one that was fraught with challenges and risks, and perhaps most significantly, that Andrew's 'enlightened' judgment was trustworthy.

No doubt positive changes, unimaginable ten to fifteen years earlier, did occur over time.¹² And for many who became students in later years, this was their only experience. However, the lack of in-depth reflection and questioning of our past history with Andrew and the effects this had had on so many people, even as we were emerging from it ourselves, meant that a deeper cultural integration could not occur. There was not even the awareness that this was missing. *Instead, our focus as an organization was relentlessly on the "future" and on the process occurring between us.*

That the future cannot be separated from the past, incredibly, didn't occur to us at an organizational/cultural level, even though individually within EnlightenNext, a big part of our spiritual training was to become as conscious as possible of the different layers of our own conditioned selves. Awareness of the entirety of who we are, including our primitive less conscious motivations, was accepted as an ongoing process and practice for all of us.

Psychology 101 and serious spiritual training both make the point that disowned or unconscious parts of the psyche inevitably influence who and how we are as human beings, despite our 'better' intentions. The fact that we did not apply this to the painful events that had occurred in EnlightenNext's history meant that the shadow of this was still alive despite significant changes in the latter years.

¹² See Changes, under Why I Stayed

Some may disagree, but in looking back at what took place over the span of time involved, I believe this to be core to EnlightenNext's dissolution. Deep fault lines developed beneath the surface over years. Had there been an environment of trust and hence the space to openly question and examine significant issues and questions as they arose without fear of repercussions or even being expelled this would, I believe, have enriched our understanding of the complexity involved in spiritual development. It would also have created the conditions for a natural empathy that became frighteningly lacking, and may have changed the course of history for many individuals and for EnlightenNext itself.

Paradox of Lack of Cultural Self-enquiry: One of the paradoxes of EnlightenNext and of Andrew is that for years we were engaged in constant spiritual and philosophical enquiry including, as mentioned, the cultivation of a rigorous personal self-enquiry.

Andrew himself was known and loved for his philosophical and spiritual curiosity. His passion and willingness to ask real questions was reflected in his magazine *What is Enlightenment?* Later published as *EnlightenNext*. Possessed of a hunger to explore significant cultural questions, he and his editorial teams brought a depth and innovative perspective to the topics they explored that became respected worldwide. Why then would the EnlightenNext culture around Andrew, cultivated by him, be so markedly devoid of this quality of cultural *self*-questioning? In looking at this question these past two years as someone who was deeply involved, amongst the many factors, the one that has stood out is the self-enclosed world we lived in. This, I believe, inevitably resulted in an overly subjective view of us as a culture that kept shadows buried and alive. It also maintained, for both better and worse, the traditional structure of the guru-student relationship

Foxhollow served as our 'retreat from the world' from 1996 on. Its inception was a magnet for all the love and optimism of the student body at the time with people streaming in from around the world offering renovation skills, labor, money, and gifts to bring this "world center" into being.

At this time Andrew was engaged with all of us in deep spiritual work and this withdrawal into an environment of such beauty - unspoiled forests, mountains and lakes, facilitated a powerful spiritual focus away from the eyes and distractions of the 'world'.¹³ No doubt this pristine and spiritually austere environment created the conditions for the powerful collective breakthroughs that later ensued along with the slow but steady process of maturation, both individual and collective, that occurred within the global student body over seventeen years. However the other

¹³ This had already started to take on darker inclinations in some of the extreme methods and outcomes involved in his work on ego. But at this point Andrew had almost complete trust from his students.

side of this is that over time we became our own ‘island’, creating our own universe with little real outside input for years. In retrospect this clearly fostered a unanimity of view, with its attendant unspoken pressure of conformity, and ultimately an almost impermeable arrogance – the opposite of healthy cultural self-questioning. This was even more exaggerated in Andrew. His unbroken self-confidence in the purity of his own motivations as a guru was powerful, giving him access to a fearlessness and spiritual transmission that inspired enormous confidence in all of us, both in him and in Spirit itself. *But*, it also resulted in what increasingly became a pattern of fierce rebuke and/or punishment in response to any real questioning of his authority or decision-making. This was almost always framed as an expression of ‘ego’ and had the inevitable effect over time of instilling self-doubt and an unhealthy fear of questioning the status quo particularly during the formative mid phase of EnlightenNext’s history¹⁴. Eventually this situation contributed to many students leaving.

The Guru-Student Relationship

One of the central factors in EnlightenNext’s story is the guru paradigm that it existed in. In a conversation with a student of ten years with regard to the question of Andrew’s abuse of power as a spiritual teacher she remarked, “Oh, I never saw Andrew as perfect, that’s just blind guru devotion...I never surrendered to him. I wouldn’t have lasted at Foxhollow for even a month.... Why don’t people just take responsibility for themselves?” This may be true of herself but it made me think more deeply about what really motivated so many of us to ‘abandon’ our postmodern sensibilities for independence in order to give ourselves over to Andrew as our spiritual mentor, *completely*, even to the point at times of overriding rational and moral concerns.

The sentiment expressed by this student with regard to the guru/student relationship that existed between Andrew and the majority of his core students, sounded similar to descriptions of EnlightenNext as being merely “a blue meme cult.¹⁵” Although no doubt there are elements of truth in both these statements, I believe they overly simplify (and miss) the radical nature of this classical sacred relationship and why it can on one hand be so powerfully liberating and yet, on the other, so problematic with regard to issues of abuse of power. This seems to be particularly so in the West.

¹⁴ In later years, as students matured spiritually and gained more confidence, Andrew was often challenged respectfully, but directly. Unfortunately his lack of willingness to ultimately trust led to an impossible impasse.

¹⁵A reference to one of the memetic categories in Don Beck’s Spiral Dynamics Theory

This thinking, common in postmodern circles, tends to reduce educated, sensitive, independent thinking people to an inexplicable mindlessness that is two-dimensional and in the case of EnlightenNext, simply not true. Both seem easy but inadequate explanations.

However, the trail of destruction from the failures of the guru-student relationship has forced many, including myself, to a deeper scrutiny of both the significance and the existential dangers inherent in its structure. In the West there is nothing comparable to this relationship outside of the Church and its nature is rarely understood. It is often viewed simply as domination by and submission to a powerful charismatic authority figure – relegated culturally, as often quoted, to a blue meme categorization (as in SDi). In its corrupted form no doubt this is what it can become. However it has also in many cases proved to be a strange mix of both a vehicle for powerful liberation and human development, as well as one of devastating abuse of power.

Whether we consider ourselves postmodern self-authoring individuals or from a more traditional orientation, the transgression of this relationship by the guru, when it's authentic, *is* devastating. This has obviously been played out over years at EnlightenNext.

Andrew as Guru: As varying and unique as people's experiences are, from every corner of the globe the intensity of the effects of the rupture with Andrew for hundreds of people is because he was an *authentic* guru. Illumined by, and transmitting a powerfully awakened consciousness, he touched the hearts, the souls and minds of thousands of men and women who came into direct contact with him over years. *Many* experienced radical changes in their consciousness and self-sense which altered their lives forever. I am one of them.

Not long into his teaching career, based on his experience with us, his students, Andrew became aware that enlightenment experiences in themselves rarely lead to sustained change at the level of self-structure, habituated as it is in its conviction of its separateness. Except for the rarest of individuals, he surmised that radical transformation of the 'small self' would take more conscious ongoing development. And, in order to create an awakened culture, sustained development of the individual was/is needed. Following in the footsteps of earlier pioneers of evolutionary spirituality, this insight was unknowingly the genesis of evolutionary enlightenment as a spiritual path.

Andrew then made a significant decision by intentionally assuming the responsibility of the role of guru, along with the power inherent in it. Prior to this he had aspired to be more like his own teacher, in the tradition of a wandering

savant, inspiring and awakening those around him to their true nature. I remember vividly, Andrew physically shaking when he told some of us of this decision. Awed and humbled by the enormity of the responsibility, he was aware that the mutual bond between guru and student depended on a profound level of trust, purity of motivation, and vulnerability at a soul level in both. At the time he entered into this role, it was with a great degree of surrender.

The Absence of Lineage: The bond between guru-student has always been regarded as sacred in the East. It is honored and respected as the most profound relationship any human being can have. A close friend from India explained to me that safeguards against the dangers inherent in the power structure of this relationship have traditionally been kept in place through the guru's accountability to a lineage, or through the oversight and guidance of a senior spiritual authority. Most gurus, he told me, spend decades doing intensive practice under their own guru. This serves to instill and reinforce the qualities of humility, compassion and Love essential to the core of the teaching function embodied by the guru figure.

Andrew was sensitive to the destructive effects of the abuse of this relationship, tragically commonplace during the cultural/ spiritual intersection of East /West in the sixties, seventies and eighties. In fact many students he met were clearly burned at a soul level by their experience of this. A controversial and outspoken voice in the early years of his teaching work, he boldly called out spiritual teachers to 'walk their talk' and honor the sacred nature and responsibility of this bond. I remember clearly his uncanny insight into the delicate dynamics of this relationship and its dangers, even publishing an insightful article on the subject. For those of us who were students, this deepened our trust in his integrity. That Andrew would end up transgressing this relationship himself was unthinkable at the time. In retrospect, as a westerner with neither a lineage he related to, nor guidance from a spiritual mentor, in a paradigm of undisputed authority and power, this was a disaster waiting to happen.

At the beginning of the nineties, early in his teaching career, Andrew severed his relationship with his own guru, HWL Poonja. Aware of the painful and confusing dynamics occurring between Andrew and his teacher at the time, this seemed to all of us an act of integrity – bold and independent. This break no doubt led to innovative breakthroughs in Andrew's own teaching and thinking but the cost has obviously been very high. As many of us know, in time, Andrew, empowered by the risk he took to step out on his own, became answerable to almost no one.¹⁶ Despite

¹⁶ Although paradoxically always seeking 'advice' from those around him, he inevitably ended up doing what *he* wanted to do. This advice seeking was later revealed to us as being more often Andrew looking for confirmation of what he wanted, and resulted in a pattern of then blaming others when things did not work out as he hoped.

increasing examples of mistaken judgments with adverse consequences he grew to trust himself exclusively, eschewing challenges to his decisions, including from those who loved and respected him and, in their own right, cared for EnlightenNext's mission. Impervious also to the growing critiques of former students, even as those critiques became more public, and ultimately overriding the counsel of his more senior students and spiritual peers from other paths, Andrew even ignored the advice of professional organizational consultants with regard to important issues that he clearly lacked insight into.¹⁷

An Unbreakable Connection: A question that has often arisen from both within and from circles outside of EnlightenNext is - *“why do former students of Andrew Cohen not just move on? Why the intensity of acrimony and suffering still?”*

Although no doubt there are many reasons, to me the answer to this lies fundamentally in the depth and nature of this relationship itself. I don't know if any of us, once this bond has genuinely occurred, are ever completely 'free' of it. It takes place in a different dimension of our being. This does not mean that we cannot *be* Free, but I suspect the connection is and always will be there. Andrew was my only guru, and having experienced and witnessed with him the complexity of this relationship - its propensity for unimaginable Love and Liberation and also for abuse, the connection remains unbroken and always has, no matter what my thoughts or feelings about it are or have been, at any one time. By connection, I mean the bond that exists beyond the demise of formal relationship itself. Many who left years ago have taken up new lives completely yet still feel 'connected' to Andrew, even though the formal bond of teacher/student has been long since terminated. *However where destructive trauma occurred and has as yet to be redressed, it remains a hidden wound at the level of the soul.*

My Own Story: I was never a 'blind guru devotee' in the sense that this implies someone looking for an authority figure to 'take care of it all'. Few people involved with Andrew, I believe, actually were. In fact he himself would frequently say that he was "Looking for partners, not followers".

Andrew would be the first to agree it was my arrogance, pride and lack of surrender that led to our struggles and my exile on and off for a period of ten years; initially from the London community and later from Foxhollow. And he was right (not with the excessive measures he took at times), but he saw through my righteous ego, stubbornness, lack of humility, and the destructive separation this created. He recognized how obstructive this was to the delicate shared depth and dynamic unity

¹⁷ One repeated theme of advice given to EnlightenNext Inc. (the organization) was the "separation of Church and State". Although EnlightenNext was not a church, the implications of this advice were obvious.

he and we were trying to cultivate between us. As my teacher, the covenant we shared was that he would respond to this and guide me, which he did relentlessly. Part of this process (amongst other things) was a painful, and at times frightening, dismantling by Andrew, of my tenacious adherence to my self-image as a 'caring' person. The 'battle' that ensued precipitated an existential crisis of the kind traditionally navigated only under the guidance of a guru, someone intimate with this terrain. For any teacher to genuinely take on this responsibility, obviously it is an enormous act of Love and humility – to care for the student's soul. And traditionally he/she would have gone through this trial in some form themselves. This was not so in Andrew's case.

I had persistently stayed away from this kind of 'surrender' to a guru figure for the twelve years that I had lived as a seeker and practitioner prior to meeting Andrew; including seven years in India spent mostly on self-retreat. I was actually suspicious and afraid of this relationship, safe-guarding my 'independence'. And although incredibly fortunate to spend significant time learning from several legendary spiritual masters who had a profound influence on my life, I never surrendered to any of them as my guru. In fact, despite mind-altering revelatory spiritual experiences that occurred during long periods of isolation and intensive practice, sometimes lasting for months, ultimately I came up against the limitations of having myself as my own ceiling.

Meeting a guru, I discovered, is not just 'meeting' a someone. In the East, as discussed, this meeting is recognized for its significance and regarded as a sacred and rare event. I had known Andrew for six months already, and although intensely inspired and drawn to him, I put a wall between us, as was obvious to those around me. However at a certain point I realized, as viscerally averse as I was to letting go of my independence, I was in fact imprisoned by it. Looking around at others involved with Andrew at the time, it began to dawn on me that this unfathomable (to my postmodern western mind) spiritual relationship, which by its nature demanded I would have to let go of 'control', was indeed a portal to the Freedom and clarity I had tasted but not sustained. Andrew seemed aware of my reticence, and generally left me a lot of space at the time.

One night in Amsterdam however, at a public teaching in a student's apartment, my resistance imploded. From the moment I sat down a bottomless luminous Fullness engulfed me. It continued for the whole evening. I never opened my eyes during the entirety of the experience, compelled by the glorious abyss opening up within. Unknown to me, Andrew was aware of what was occurring and leapt up from his seat at the end of the night. He came over and sat on the floor in front of me, taking my hands in his. My eyes were still closed and my body was shaking with the inner explosion taking place. He was utterly present for what was occurring, a solid non-interfering yet intimate presence.

That night I discovered for myself that a true meeting with your guru is a radical displacement of one's 'self' boundaries within an awakening of Self, of Love non-separate with the guru. I discovered that he or she is a portal. Despite my fears of diminishment or loss of personal independence, in the nexus of that meeting I experienced literally no 'other' - nothing lay 'outside' of 'me', of the infinitude of Being that just was. For someone who didn't trust easily, I discovered the intrinsic nature of this 'meeting' is acausal Trust. Not in this case, of Andrew the man, but inherent in the awakened Beingness experienced between, beyond, and as us both.

A Relationship Like No Other: The liberating intimacy of this non-dual relationship by its nature is Pure. And the trust it engenders I found for many years was the vehicle that allowed me to go beyond myself when I was deeply challenged to let go of tenacious pride and separation.

During times of crises, of doubt, or even existential terror, when I would find myself frozen behind a wall of seemingly impenetrable separation, or in a state of psychological 'lockdown', it was my trust in Andrew as my guru ultimately and the fundamental Love at the core of this relationship that allowed me to let go again and again.¹⁸ Like others, in these moments I would rediscover in and as myself the fearlessness and depth inherent in our connectedness beyond ego. And the collective purpose of the often searing spiritual 'work' we were engaged in would set my heart on fire again.

This was when that relationship worked...obviously this was not the whole story.

Love, Power, and Abuse: the Formative Years

Given some of the accounts that have emerged, particularly with regard to the extreme measures and demands Andrew made on his students and the abuse that was mixed in with this, it's understandable to want to write it *all* off as abuse. With respect for the fact that each person's experience is clearly different, the years I have spent with Andrew as my teacher have been an amalgam of often extreme and diametrically contrasting experiences, the impact and learning of which has been equally varied.

¹⁸ Within all the controversy and conflicting experiences, I do believe that Andrew's motivation initially in his function as guru, was primarily pure. And his intention rightly or wrongly was to 'push' us beyond the limiting precincts of egoic identification – (that fundamental conviction in our separateness and personal limitations that we habitually reverted to again and again). He saw this clinging to our separateness as an obstacle to the potential liberated consciousness of the collective. However undoubtedly this deteriorated into abusive behavior and at times vindictiveness as Andrew's unquestioned power and position gave license to his darker impulses.

The Honeymoon: Although in retrospect, the seeds for abuse were evident in Andrew's personality from early on, the first years could be described as our spiritual 'honeymoon' period. In awe of 'god' and responsibility for the "gift" his teacher had revealed to him, it was an extraordinary time; one generally characterized by Love and a powerful utopian idealism. Group outings and picnics with Andrew in the countryside, invigorating spiritual teachings extending late into the night in different cities around the world – London, Amsterdam, Rome, Tel Aviv, and later Boston, San Francisco; the atmosphere of intense but open spiritual exploration and camaraderie, along with the absence of any formal structure, created the first scent of utopia. However as we began to live together in closely-knit households and the initial 'flush' of awakened consciousness began to dim, our personal ego structures started to reveal themselves to be very much alive, with very little consciousness on our part. We began to rub up against each other, strangers, apart from our meeting through Andrew.

The Mid Years - Ego Purification: As documented by former students, the most intense period of EnlightenNext's history were the years that Andrew was, I believe, attempting to get us to dis-identify and 'transcend' our primary *identification* with ego or our sense of separate selfness. As described by every classical spiritual path before him, Andrew saw this identification as obstructing the potential of an awakened life free of the distorting grip of ego and in our case obstructing the emergence of an awakened collective. This initiated what could be seen as the mid-period of EnlightenNext's history, that of 'ego purification.' It was also the period that became, I believe, our 'dark ages'.

The first wave of this focus on transcending ego, and undoubtedly the most extreme, was Andrew's 'purge' of his leadership, to be later followed by others of the next generation.

Purges: Andrew always felt that those with more experience should be an example, and from about six years into his teaching career this was expected from those of us who were more 'senior'. The truth of the matter was that, although we had all had multiple and in many cases profound spiritual experiences, none of us really had very much knowledge, let alone self-knowledge of ego structures.

From approximately 1994– 2005, one by one successively every individual leading EnlightenNext centers around the world, or holding 'senior' positions in the US, were challenged to the core, sometimes for what seemed minor infractions or personal weaknesses. These quickly ballooned into major spiritual crises. In the earlier years gender was not an issue. The period of 'purification' that ensued involved both women and men, including those who lived in Andrew's personal household.

In his passion for ‘purifying’ us of ego Andrew would not back down or relent on the pressure he exerted to get us to let go. Instead he was constantly coming up with ‘innovative’ ways to bring this about, engaging the ‘help’ of whichever students were close to him at the time. This was itself challenging, as we would find ourselves instructed to “take on” those we shared intimate friendships with and with whom there was little between us in terms of the actual level of our development, or ego awareness. Hence these ‘role’s would be frequently reversed.

Many of us were subjected to ‘ego-breaking’ exercises or ‘theatre’ that was by nature raw and intense. In the course of this I encountered places in myself, deep primitive responses, that in a conventional life I would perhaps only have intimations of. How much of our ‘pathological’ behaviors or tendencies were *created* by Andrew’s more extreme pedagogical methods and pressure—including cruelty at times—and how real was what we ‘revealed’ of our selves whilst under pressure, is a valid question. And one that is open. Andrew would always say, “we find out who we are under pressure”. And to be sure, under extreme circumstances it wasn’t always courage and freedom that one discovered, although digging deep into one’s soul was also very much part of the process of our own development. However, raw unsavory ‘survival’ instincts often came rushing to the forefront instead. Like others, I gradually learned to recognize these for what they are, and to cultivate a presence of mind in the face of them.

An example of this imprinted a memory that has never left me. On hearing that a fellow student who had been particularly harsh when I was first expelled from the community, had herself later ‘fallen,’ I remember experiencing a surge of retributive anger. She was sent to live with a group of us who were ‘out,’ living on the periphery of the community at Foxhollow. Seeing this powerful retaliatory impulse within myself had a big impact on me. It was a moment of recognition of that impulse in the human psyche that has been, and is, the cause of endless blood cycles. Looking back at this period, vividly etched in so many minds, much of this ‘evolutionary pressure’ did not fulfill its objective, but instead ended up creating fear, recoil, or evoking humiliating or aggressive survival responses and a revolving door of ‘leadership’. This continued for a decade or more.

However, the other side of this period of confrontation with our inner shadows, likewise recorded in blogs of former students, is the genuine insights and hard-won breakthroughs that did also occur, either because of, or despite the circumstances. This has created a body of direct knowledge and experience of our human psyches and how they work.¹⁹ Although controversial and no doubt mixed, this knowledge

¹⁹ This helped many of us understand very personally how human behavior has historically, and still can, devolve entire memetic levels (SDI) when human beings feel threatened.

and experience is also a legacy from these years of deep spiritual work that so many engaged in, including many who later left. It provided a foundation for later students²⁰

The Significance of Spiritual Practice: In thinking about this period, an important and integral aspect of our lives at EnlightenNext was that we were all engaged in committed spiritual practices for hours each day. In my own experience, this provided an anchor to deeper parts of myself, as well as often providing a larger perspective during periods of acute states of existential challenge and self-confrontation. Often in a non-linear mysterious way, spiritual practice helped connect us to a core inner strength and ease of being which would bring to light and transform rigid assumptions and the hidden motives that we inevitably harbored, and at times struggled with²¹.

A simple example of this was during one particular impasse where I found myself locked into a cul de sac of my mind where *‘everything’* I did felt as if it was *‘wrong’* was *‘failing’* badly to find an authentic response within myself to Andrew’s call for leadership, especially from amongst us, his women students. Insisting, largely out of pride, that I wanted to make good on this issue, as expected from a senior student with more experience, I was far from acknowledging (primarily to myself!) the resistance and anger I was actually experiencing. As days went by, I became increasingly inauthentic and inwardly despairing. I found myself engaging in behaviors I despised – trying to *‘appease’* those helping me, going through endless empty gestures “to get it right.” So lost was I in the instinct for survival and affirmation, that I was barely aware of how I was smothering my capacity to even think clearly under a blanket of pretense and fear. One aspect of this drama, with its cumulative layers, was that I was encountering a deep-seated gender structure within myself no doubt triggered by the patriarchal context it was occurring in.²² Unbeknown to myself a state of profound existential insecurity was overriding the confidence in self I was accustomed to experiencing. Instead I found myself in the grip of what felt like a desperate need for affirmation. Authentic leadership at that moment seemed far outside the emotional orbit I was locked into. In fact, I was rapidly losing touch with my self completely, floundering in an existential quagmire that felt as if it was swallowing me.

²⁰ Over time our capacity as a collective to objectify our emotions and impulses, together, is what allowed a deeper ground of unity and trust to develop between us. No longer simply personalizing our fears or aggression, we were able to face and understand these deeply dividing impulses, together without fragmenting.

²¹ Note: see section on Spiritual Practice –Why I stayed

²² See section on Women

As the whole situation compounded, I was clearly having a negative effect on younger students. Tensions and pressure mounted. People began to avoid eye contact with me. Living so closely together, this had the effect of creating more internal panic and turmoil. I childishly yearned for the situation to magically ‘go away’, seeing no solution from the place I was in. One night while lying in bed awake, the familiar throb of fear and anxiety within me miraculously came to a standstill. A quiet detachment descended as I slowly but surely recognized the obvious truth that this situation *really* wasn’t going to ‘go away’ that I had to do something. I had to take responsibility for the situation and most of all, for myself. An image of the small attic room set above the meditation hall at Foxhollow with a prostration board on the wooden floor, flitted across my mind’s eye. It was a momentary image, a memory, but out of the depths of debilitating inertia exploded a surge of clarity – a sense of self-agency again! Andrew supported my request and a few hours later in the solitude of that small room with its tall glass windows facing the windswept pine trees outside, I began doing 5000 prostrations. The number was irrelevant but it was ‘bigger’ than me.

It took the best part of twelve plus hours. At times my thoughts felt like savage dogs biting at my ankles each time I stood back up with folded palms. Whatever happened I instinctively knew I couldn’t ‘look down’. Somehow I knew this was my way back *to myself*, even though I didn’t really understand at the time why this was so. Little did I realize I was tapping into an energy, a field thousands of years old. On completion I sat quietly for some time before leaving that room - with swollen knees and an uplifted heart, a different person. The desperate inertia and pretense that had been my constant companions for weeks vanished like wraiths from my being and the original issue itself was ‘miraculously’ transformed, as was my consciousness. The role of spiritual practice in my and our lives, for myself at least, contributed enormously in both ‘saving’ me and developing a deeper self - knowledge and conviction in Spirit.

Spiritual Camaraderie, and Outrageous Love: Another important aspect of our lives during times of challenge was the profound connection that existed between us, even when it was tested or obscured by the intensity of personal or collective tumult. From the beginning in 1986, a spiritual current existed between those of us engaged with Andrew, no matter where we were located at any one time. In the early days we would travel from one location to another as his teachings spread - a kind of ecstatic global ‘mystery tour’. From south England, to Amsterdam, Jerusalem, and the piazzas of Rome, small groups gathered, lit up by a spiritual current that was electric. With the walls of our existing lives exploding open, we engaged in endless dynamic enquiry. In 1989 after crossing the Atlantic, this was replicated on the East coast of America in the small towns and villages surrounding Amherst where Andrew began teaching. Over the years the thread of this spiritual current continued, even through the most turbulent times, and a profound and

intimate sense of camaraderie developed. Compelling by nature, with its origins in the radical encounter with the Absolute that we all share, this camaraderie was fueled by the spectrum of experiences we lived through and worked with together.

Love: Except for the first few years, Love was never a concept we talked much about within EnlightenNext. But there was an incident one night at Foxhollow that had a significant and lasting impact on me. A group of us were in the midst of what was a series of particularly difficult meetings that had ‘plateaued’ and which were tending to drag night after night into the early hours of the morning. At a certain point in what had become an emotively charged discussion, I was aware that an imperceptible Stillness had entered the room and, one by one, seemed to be touching us. The physical environment also appeared to change, and for some timeless moments (I couldn’t gauge for how long) the room appeared to be bathed in a soft luminosity. The fractious cross-currents of frustration and censure between us began to give way to a deeper listening. As we slowed down sharp lines of division faded and a tangible sense of connectedness opened up between us. I looked across the circle at a young woman who had been particularly sharp-edged. Her face, attentive and open, reflected the beauty of the presence in the room. An undefended clarity and simplicity emerged within the group. After some time we quietly filed out.

Walking through the darkness back to my room, I was aware that in a few hours we would be rising to do our pre-dawn practice of seven hundred prostrations, side by side in the meditation hall. This would be followed by two hours of meditation. A wave of enormous love for the women walking silently beside me broke within. Tears streamed down my face, veiled by the darkness. The fatigue, blame and fear that I often experienced in our meetings during that period, dissolved into a current of respect; respect and love for my ‘sisters’, and for what bound us to each other.

Some will disagree, and no doubt there are vastly varying and valid conclusions about the kind of intense practices and hours we were all engaged in, but for myself that night changed something. I understood we *are* part of a process, within a much larger Process, that was and is Love itself, aspiring to go somewhere and do something that is beyond any of us individually, and yet demands everything of us individually and together.

Love or Abuse of Power? On several occasions, however, between 1996 and 2005, particular situations did bring me to the edge of leaving Andrew as my teacher and EnlightenNext as my life. The circumstances of this near decision and the enormity of the potential repercussions caused me to reflect deeply. I came to understand directly *why* so many of my close friends had left. Although in many cases I did not

know the circumstances of their leaving, or the extent of the suffering that some had continued to experience, I understood what drove that decision.

The most impactful of those occasions, which brought me to the edge of leaving myself, took place in 2005. Sitting on the boulder-strewn mountainside above the hauntingly beautiful Monserrat monastery in northern Spain, where we had just completed a ten-day intensive retreat, I was reeling from a particularly harsh and humiliating piece of ‘theatre’ enacted through a senior peer on behalf of Andrew. A small group of us had attended this retreat as a last resort to pull ourselves out of our individual spiritual crises. At the end of what was a powerful ten days, inspired, we formally requested to meet with Andrew as our teacher. Three hours later, we found ourselves crowded together in a small hot room subjected to a demeaning performance designed only for that purpose. I wondered – was this my time now? Had I reached my limit? We hadn’t even got to see Andrew post-retreat to discuss our situation prior to this display of contempt. His message was clear.

Long since a non-smoker, alone in the falling darkness on that mountain I smoked half a pack of cheap Spanish cigarettes. As the tide of tumultuous thoughts and emotions subsided, I contemplated the entirety of the past nineteen years of my relationship with Andrew as my teacher. In this contemplation as my mind roved over the most troubling and the most profound and liberating events that had occurred, the distinction between the suffering and terror experienced through the classic spiritual ‘ordeal’ of one’s own “dark night of the soul”, and the suffering of real abuse inflicted by another, began to emerge in my consciousness. I started to recognize the former as the existential confrontation and struggle with the part of our human selves that will not let go; that refuses ‘god’, and recoils from Life beyond what’s known and secure; a struggle that has been recorded over millennia in religious texts and the solitary diaries of spiritual practitioners from both east and west, accounts of which I had consumed in my teens. The latter type of suffering, that of abuse, I began to recognize that evening (as many before me had), as the result of the abuse of power, the violation or ‘crossing of lines’ with another human being and the subsequent breaching of trust – a trust that in the relationship with a guru, is sacred. What had occurred that afternoon I knew was a crossing of lines, that nothing positive was intended, nor occurred. Andrew’s action was impulsive, purely retaliatory, a message conveying his disdain for us as senior students who were ‘failing’. This was a clarifying moment.

Sitting there alone, to my own surprise, I decided, I was *not* going to leave *because* of Andrew – *because* of his aberrant behavior as a teacher. By this time, the work we were doing together as a collective was beginning to emerge, both because of Andrew but also independent of him. In that emotional moment some could argue that this was an irrational decision, but I was not going to let him destroy this emergence because of his own issues, as tenuous as this work still was. The

Intelligence and Being of a collective based on autonomous individuals interacting beyond ego, as a structure in consciousness itself, was gaining its own momentum. And I wanted to continue with *this* work, together with those I had traveled this journey with for so long.

A Turning Point: No doubt in retrospect, I have regrettably given Andrew the benefit of the doubt, as my teacher, at times when it wasn't deserved. This has been at great cost not only to myself but also to others, which is a painful fact; but that evening on that mountain in Spain was a turning point. It didn't mean I did not continue to give Andrew the benefit of the doubt at times I now regret, but I was no longer completely vulnerable to his existential onslaughts. Like many, during periods of humiliating rage or eroding self-doubt, I had taken solace in the book *Chasm of Fire* by the great woman sadhaka, Irina Tweedie. And I am grateful for the light this book threw on the subject of the teacher-student relationship and the spiritual companionship her words afforded. But my critical contemplation that evening on the mountain represented for myself a departure from the view of the fundamental infallibility of the guru. The internal stance of unconditional surrender to the guru, that had proved to be so liberating at times, was broken.²³ Over the following decade it became clear to me that when Love is the guiding motivation of the guru, and Freedom and the *integration* of self are the goal of both teacher and student, harshness in a teacher's actions is not experienced as abuse. It can be painful and extremely confronting, evoking powerful primal emotions, but I have found it does not *fragment one's fundamental sense of Self*. On the contrary, on the other side of these confrontations, one can and often does discover a rare kind of inner strength or existential confidence at the core of which lies an empathy and Love for others also on the path, plus a deeper trust in one's teacher. Abuse on the other hand, and its devastating effects, are the result of the misuse of power by the guru when punitive motives and/or unconscious drives for dominance supersede that Love, and fundamental trust is violated. The destruction of existential confidence this can wreak often leads to a sense of alienation from others and mistrust in one's teacher, or even 'god'/Spirit itself. Both of these experiences, diametrically opposed in their intention and outcomes, occurred within EnlightenNext's history. Both are Andrew's and our legacy, and in meeting with people of diverse experience of EnlightenNext, both are evident.

Abuse: There is a lot of conversation and countless articles on the subject of abuse. That 'abuse' should even enter the lexicon associated with 'enlightenment' is an

²³ Although this was a turning point, I continued to regard Andrew as my teacher. I still trusted what I assumed was his fundamental motivation as a teacher but I knew he was not infallible. What ensued was a developing spiritual independence from him. This enabled my peers and I to later challenge Andrew on significant issues. This independence amongst his more senior students did result in some changes in the culture and in Andrew's behavior with younger students (see Changes under Why I Stayed).

irreconcilable contradiction, one that sadly reflects a too frequent occurrence. However, given the history of examples of indisputably enlightened men and women whose personalities exhibited abusive traits, and who in their role as spiritual teachers were clearly flawed in this way, this is a profound and ongoing enquiry all to itself. Ironically it was Andrew's discovery of his guru's frailty as a human being – the fact that he had fathered a child with one of his students – that catalyzed Andrew's own enquiry into the nature of enlightenment, resulting in the publication of his magazine, *What is Enlightenment?* [Later renamed *EnlightenNext*].

Again, in my understanding, *motive* is critical in the dynamics involved in this unique relationship. But motive is hard to decipher categorically in another, especially within the guru/student relationship, which is unorthodox by its nature. It is usually only through results revealed over time that this can be deduced and even then there can be ambiguity.

Throughout the history of spiritual endeavor, and certainly with Andrew, unconventional, politically incorrect interactions or tactics have been used to provoke crises within students; crises intended to lead to a confrontation with one's own egoic identifications, ideally resulting in a liberating breakthrough. These 'confrontations' can bring to the surface ambiguous but powerful forces hidden within the psyche that create division within the self, creating havoc in our lives and those around us. The goal is for these to be made visible, transparent, in order to be transcended and/or healthily integrated.

As documented in the books and blog sites of former students of Andrew, this frequent style of pedagogy with its questionable motivations was successful in some cases, but also wrenchingly traumatic and /or destructive in many others. Andrew often quoted evolutionary biologist, Elizabeth Sautouris, that, 'evolution occurs through stress and pressure'. But the crude and sometimes cavalier application, or mis-application of this biological principle as a *given* across the swathe of human development, often led to results that more closely resembled something of a 'de-evolutionary' and inhumane nature. There were occasions when I experienced my own and our collective consciousness reverting to primitive levels of survival and strategies of power (SDi Red meme) under extreme duress.

Andrew, as guru, more often than not lacked sensitivity to that unknown edge within a human being where, in pushing our limits, doors open and we discover ourselves beyond self-perceived boundaries. Too often, as many of us know, he pushed too hard and for too long, resulting in a breakdown rather than a breakthrough.

Denial of 'God': However, to me, one of the most iniquitous and painful aspects of Andrew's and our history, is the damage created by Andrew's repudiation (as guru)

of the spiritual impulse and consciousness of women and men who chose, or were forced to leave the organization and Andrew as their teacher. In other words, many of those who left experienced a negation at a soul level of their spiritual consciousness and the validity of any spiritual pursuit they took up after their time with Andrew. These students were often branded as “failures” or “traitors”, and communication with them in most cases was categorically ended.²⁴ This harsh condemnation, with its brutal and unjust dismissal of self, created an experience of existential worthlessness which for many has been, and is deeply destructive and enormously challenging to recover from. Many who did not leave but ended up for years ostracized on the periphery of the community also lived their lives under the shadow of this same stigma, drained of the precious confidence in Self that Andrew himself had once evoked. This occurred frequently during the period from the mid 90’s – mid 2000’s.

What is most egregious about this is that these were not women or men who simply had a casual engagement with Andrew. They were students who had entrusted their souls to his guidance and who in most cases had given everything of themselves, including voluntarily giving up careers, homes, family, financial stability and other resources – the classic ‘lay’ life, in response to Andrew’s passionate vision – to “create a revolution in consciousness and culture”. In the totality of their hearts’ response, these were revolutionaries responding to a revolutionary call. And as students, irrespective of the specific circumstances surrounding their decision to leave, most had engaged in deep and at times heroic spiritual work as well as having given generously financially and/or in other practical ways to EnlightenNext for years, as either staff or volunteers.

Some people left for ethical reasons and/or deep disagreement with Andrew and some for ‘survival’;²⁵ for others this was simply and legitimately not their path or way. Unfortunately within EnlightenNext there was no room for this. Alternative paths and means of developing, and expressing one’s highest aspirations were generally not considered or respected. The concept of “many rooms in the mansion” did not exist in our culture or our thinking until too late. Obviously this does not mean that there were not issues of ego involved at times regarding reasons people left, or that every person behaved exemplarily. But, the Love and guiding wisdom of the Guru to respond in the interests of the student’s spiritual welfare was clearly absent in most of these situations. Lastly on this subject, also notably absent, was and has been, appreciation and respect for the fact that so many educated sensitive

²⁴ In the absence of communication between those who left EnlightenNext and those who stayed, assumptions were made in both directions, and a simplistic narrative persisted within EnlightenNext that ensured separation, namely, that those who had left were living their own lives, no longer interested.

²⁵ See section on Staying and Leaving

people renounced the dominant sway of our mainstream hyper-individualistic culture, to respond to their innermost spiritual aspirations in such a radical real and manifest way.

Although no doubt the culpability of this lies at Andrew's feet primarily, it's been a shocking and humbling revelation personally, to discover the *pervasiveness* of this repudiation of Self and its effects on so many; and to take in how this was reinforced by a culture, our culture,²⁶ that did not question this for far too long, or even enquire about those who left – often people with whom I had shared soul-level friendships. No doubt there are multiple reasons this occurred, and it is equally true that no one who left enquired about the welfare of those of us who stayed, but fundamentally I see this as a deep scar on EnlightenNext's (my and our) history and Andrew's tenure as an influential, innovative spiritual teacher. The suffering that ensued is profound and I personally feel deeply regretful for my own inherent complicity in this.

Postscript: The question that haunts many of us and has been the subject of much discussion is – 'how could this devaluation of human beings go almost unquestioned for years within a group of people who shared deep spiritual values? History and research from various social sciences on 'group think' and the behavior of cults, no doubt have a lot to say about this phenomenon but there is another element that is also significant:

Because of the specific nature of the relationship between guru and student²⁷ and also because of deeply ingrained mythic ideas regarding enlightenment itself, questioning one's guru in a fundamental way is very challenging. History reveals that it rarely happens in significant ways until a student breaks off the relationship and actually leaves their spiritual teacher, stepping outside not only the relationship but also the world-view held by that teacher. The unconditional nature of that bond is what makes it so powerful and so effective in the context of spiritual liberation... and also so vulnerable to abuse. This is further complicated by the fact that when, and if, a meeting with one's guru truly occurs, profound Love and Gratitude spontaneously arise for one's guru, who is the face of one's own Self. Questioning or doubting one's guru can be experienced as tantamount to doubting the Self.

²⁶ This aspect of EnlightenNext culture began very early and although there were exceptions where relationships and friendships continued, this was rare. This was questioned and began to break down in different ways during the last few years.

²⁷ Ref The Guru Student relationship

Changes in Andrew and his Teachings

How something that began with undeniable purity²⁸ and evoked such sincerity and commitment for so many years became corroded to the point of implosion is a huge question. In retrospect, although the set up for abuse was there from the outset with aspects of Andrew's personality and the absolute authority inherent in the guru paradigm, in re-examining our past, I have come to see there were a series of slow but significant changes that occurred both within Andrew and in his interpretation of his own teachings.

Changes Within the Guru: The Love that was at the core of Andrew's own awakening, so tangible in the early days, over time as described, became more erratic, especially in his work with his formal students. I am not referring to the presence or absence of harshness but to the mixed motivations and shadows, both conscious and unconscious, operating within Andrew that started to override that Love. Initially, Andrew's teaching responses to students were for the most part (not always) innovative, and at times brilliantly and sensitively attuned to the context and capacities of the student. These powerful moments of existential shifts in our self - identity are intimately imprinted for many of us at a soul level. Despite the emotional challenges, the edginess and risks Andrew took with some of us in earlier times, there was a sense of something deeply positive, trustworthy and even noble being engaged in together. Most of all, there was a sense of shared purpose and mission. The intimacy and depth of Andrew's Love was also always free of any sexual innuendo, which for those of us who were women especially, inspired trust²⁹.

Over time however, this fluidity and sensitivity gave way to more rigid one-dimensional and forceful modes of 'teaching'. The fearless lack of orthodoxy and wildness many of us loved in Andrew began to morph into arrogance, a disdain for people's weaknesses and struggles, and a fascination with a kind of machismo. As hard as it was to definitively categorize this as such at the time, given the context, in looking back through the lens of my own and others' experience, a hardness developed in Andrew within the guru function that resulted in a disturbing lack of natural empathy. His responses appeared to be disconnected from the mystical Source which he himself had frequently referred to as being his "refuge" in the early years of his teaching, and thus from the truth that we are not separate.

²⁸ The "purity" I am referring to here is not Andrew, the person, but the transmission of liberated consciousness that is inherently good and 'pure', and is not the possession of any one human being but is the "Divine spark" that has sent philosophers and mystics on their quest for millennia.

²⁹ See section on Women

Narcissism: Another factor in this shift in Andrew, one that crept into his language and relationship both with his students and with regard to our work together, was an increasingly narcissistic reference to himself as being central. This was not the case initially. An example of this shift is in how Andrew came to frame *commitment* – a core value within the student context. Commitment, meaning the conscious prioritizing of Spirit or liberation within one’s life (as articulated in his cornerstone teaching: *Cultivating Intention*), became over time to be more about *allegiance to Andrew* rather than to Spirit or our ‘work’. Our existential struggles began to be overtly framed and personalized by Andrew as a question of, “Are you with *me*, or against *me*?” The first time I heard this definitively applied to myself in the late 1990’s, I found it alarming. The effect of this was that my attention became more focused on my relationship with Andrew than on the work we were doing together, collectively. This was subtle because Andrew was the guru and within the context of the student-teacher relationship this means the embodiment of awakened Self, our Self; but more and more the visceral sense was that it was Andrew, the *person*, not the guru, we had to be ‘aligned’ with.

Although present from early on, betrayal of him personally became a familiar theme. This intensified over time, and I believe corrupted the natural Love for Spirit and Guru that was so alive in our hearts at the beginning. An increasing tendency towards obeisance when one was seriously challenged - i.e. attempts to placate Andrew’s anger or displeasure, to conform to what was perceived as being ‘right’, or even worse, to ‘prove’ our sincerity with gifts etc (often way beyond our financial reach³⁰) surreptitiously took up residence in our culture undermining the true foundation of that relationship.

The Birth of Evolutionary Enlightenment: The correspondence between the changes occurring within Andrew and the impact these had on his interpretation and emphasis within his own teachings, showed up over time in his work with regard to evolutionary enlightenment, and no doubt shaped the culture of EnlightenNext.

The intersection of science, philosophy and Spirit began to influence us largely initially through the work of a stream of evolutionary thinkers such as cosmologist, Brian Swimme, spiritual teacher and thinker, Sri Aurobindo, Franciscan priest and paleontologist, Teilhard De Jardin, contemporary philosopher and writer, Ken Wilbur, evolutionary biologist Elizabeth Sahtouris, and later the work of Professor and activist Don Beck. In 2004 Beck visited Foxhollow and took us through his model of memetic cultural development based on the work of his mentor, Clare

³⁰ This corrosive practice became commonplace for a long period but later diminished and eventually stopped altogether when many in the student body became existentially more confident in ‘owning’ our own relationship to our mission.

Grave's theory of Spiral Dynamics. Although still outside the formal student body at the time, I was given permission by Andrew to attend Beck's daylong presentation at Foxhollow. At the time I found it both moving, and illuminating.³¹

As controversial in some spiritual and sociological circles as evolutionary theory is, especially with regard to consciousness, the contemplation of a cosmic developmental context for Life, not just biological life but *also* for consciousness itself, had a huge impact on all of us. This was further supported by our engagement with western thinking such as that of Hegel, Jean Gebser, Alfred North Whitehead and others. The concept of the universe, and us as the human species as indivisible creative expressions of a complexifying cosmic process (one becoming more conscious of Itself) was thrilling. It seemed to be a natural and contemporary recapitulation of the classic realization stemming from traditional non-dual Eastern teachings. Not only, as the Buddha taught some 2000 years ago, are Form and Emptiness One, but that One is *moving*.

This bought the non-duality of the One and the Many alive for us within a context that was inherently spiritual and developmental simultaneously. It was an exciting time of renewed exploration. The responsibility of *being* and *becoming* ever more conscious participants, non-separate from the Life process itself, brought a more vivid sense of purpose and responsibility to human existence. What I understood this to mean is, far from the hubristic sentiment that we are 'masters of the universe' that the our modernist revolution has filled us with, rather whoever we are, we represent in our real-time lives the potential and/or the limitations of humanity to express that One in all its diversity – even more so to aspire to do this together. This gave greater impetus to my/our spiritual practice, our Self-enquiry, and whatever ways we could increase Self awareness.

To me this contemporary recapitulation of the age old spiritual impulse to create "god's will on earth" was NOT about having a fixed or grandiose idea of how to do this but was a greater inducement to let go and become, to whatever degree we could, responsive to that non-dual 'god' creative impulse that exists in all of us towards Goodness, Truth and Beauty. This is not always 'beautiful' by any means and as we all know, immensely challenging; but for myself this gave greater incentive to want to let go of my egoic agendas and find out what this impulse is, and what we could do together as human beings.

How do we live together on this earth beyond our habituated patterns of self-interest and survival? It's a huge quest and question, utterly humbling in the

³¹ Although my appreciation for Beck's work remains, I have come to question the extent of the universalism inherent in this work, which appears now to me to omit the complexity and differences in the cultural development of civilizations outside of a western origin.

challenge it presents to our very human nature, as our own history with EnlightenNext is evidence of. But it is one that fired, and still fires my heart. As I took in the message from our evolutionary forbears that our lives really do matter, as insignificant as they appear to be in the cosmos, this brought not only renewed meaning and direction to Life, but also potential dignity and purpose to the human struggle.³² This included the long dark years of ego ‘battle’ within our own small context.

Loss of Interconnectedness: In retrospect however, over time, Andrew seemed to lose the complexity subtlety and significance of Indra’s web of interconnectedness within this cosmic developmental context; and along with this, its very human implications. Paradoxically, this loss ran counter to his own initial powerful realization of the Creative Impulse. With this ‘second ‘awakening, he had passionately and elegantly articulated the holistic sensibilities and fluid responsiveness of the Creative Impulse, with its implications for a profoundly integrated world. This took root in his student body – further filling out the original vision and potential of living an awakened life together – a life aspiring to be increasingly informed by the reality of relatedness, and the intuition of Wholeness. As the innovative aspect of his teachings became a more prominent focus however, this insight into the Creative Impulse at the heart of Life came to be interpreted by Andrew in increasingly reductive ways – almost in uni-directional terms. In fact what became progressively emphasized was a linear, almost aggressive modernist-style ‘progress’ disregardful of context; a force seemingly disconnected from its Source and the depth, intricacy and Intelligence of its own context and creation. Many of us instinctively reacted to this, but we were also deeply embedded in it. Andrew’s often-quoted refrain to his audiences when referring to the Creative Impulse of, “Go baby Go!” captures this.... Eros (Creative Impulse) began to feel increasingly isolated from its natural indivisibility within an interrelated Whole and what this means in relation to our humanity.

Ironically, one of the most impactful aspects of Andrew’s work with us, one that has had an enduring influence on myself and hundreds of others, is the importance he impressed on us of *consequence*. In other words, that each and every action we take matters and that we, as human beings, are constantly affecting each other and the consciousness we generate between us. This is a simple concept but was and is very challenging to embody. Out of this simple truth come the cultures we build and the relationship we have to our precious home – the planet itself. Radically contrary to the messages of contemporary western culture, dominated by values of hyper-individualism with its rights (or license) to do what we want to do, often regardless of consequence, Andrew’s original message in the teaching of evolutionary

³² This allowed for the fact of our human imperfection and our impulse towards Goodness, Truth and Beauty.

enlightenment was that we are profoundly interconnected and the world we create reflects this. Despite the painful gap between what he saw and what he lived, Andrew enforced this message throughout his formal student body.

Loss of Being: In reflecting on these subterranean currents and their impact, another important development in the way Andrew taught, is that as powerful and compelling as this awakening to primordial Creativity was and is, in reality the subtle Intelligence and sensibility of Being at its very core, became less valued. This no doubt contributed to the reductive emphasis on ‘verticality’ and speed, at the expense of depth and complexity. Contrary to his own original insights of “not knowing” and of “leaning forward off balance”, an ideological urgency with its assertive sense of certainty, took precedence in the way Andrew spoke and conducted his life. His emphasis on our capacity for conscious human agency became progressively divested of an awareness and creativity anchored in Mystery. At the same time, the word “love” was almost banished as part of our vocabulary, dismissed as a lesser attribute of human consciousness. With this, Love as the essence of ‘Eros’ (Being /Creativity indivisible) itself, also sank into obscurity.

The Paradox of Andrew as a Teacher: For many people outside of EnlightenNext, listening to Andrew speak publicly or participating on retreats with him, this disconnection was not apparent. Nor was this the entirety of our, his students’, experience of him either. If it had been so, EnlightenNext would probably have closed years ago and Andrew’s tenure as a powerful guru and visionary been much briefer. It was more complex than this.

Paradoxically, the vastness and sensibilities of an awakened Mind/Heart continued to pour through him, even as these shifts were taking place. This was especially the case on retreats and in formal teaching situations. With intimate precision and depth Andrew could, and did articulate the human predicament and the intricacies of spiritual development within a cosmic context in ways that were stunning and elevating, touching our innermost depths. At EnlightenNext public retreats, the visible development of consciousness that took place within the collective through carefully cultivated conditions and instrumentation based on years of experience became renown and sought after training. Not only this, but despite the changes in Andrew, development continued to occur within the student body. Many outside of EnlightenNext were attracted to the depth, authenticity and spiritual camaraderie that continued to shine through, despite everything. From many outside accounts

this has been the repute of those involved with EnlightenNext at whatever era, and continues to be a visible attribute whether one stayed or left. ³³

Complexity of the Man: For many of us working closely with Andrew, as a complex and contradictory personality, he continued to express at times, even towards the end, the vulnerability and innocent curiosity that had always been so compellingly human about him. This does not diminish any one of our own responsibilities, but this confusing picture no doubt contributed to many of us closely involved (at whatever point in EnlightenNext's history) to giving Andrew the benefit of the doubt, and trusting him at times, even when we were in fact overriding our own deeper concerns. However, in the final years the contradictions, especially felt at Foxhollow – Andrew's home and EnlightenNext's world center – became extreme as he increasingly reacted to his students' visible independence and experience in their own right, the root of many 'crises' throughout EnlightenNext's history.³⁴ Ironically the real 'partnership' he had always wanted was available, but sadly he was not.

That such extremes - such surrender and vulnerability and such autocratic control, such vast Love and insight and such lack of empathy, even cruelty, can exist within one human being was, and is, challenging to grapple with. To be sure the polarities of human nature exist within all of us but history indicates that with absolute power, such as that inherent in the role of guru, the tendency to give license to these polarities, unfettered by external restraints, is not uncommon and tends to be extreme. This raises a red flag on the question of the relationship between enlightenment and moral development or, its inexplicable seeming lack of relationship.

A Binary Perspective: the Effects on the Culture of EnlightenNext

Ego/Non Ego: In attempting to trace the fault-lines that developed over years and led, I believe, to tensions within the cultural psyche and structure of EnlightenNext that ultimately erupted, the early creation of a powerful binary worldview seems significant. This came about through the clear distinction articulated by Andrew

³³ This points to the fact that that this Depth etc. was not "created" by Andrew, but is our birth right as human beings. Andrew was a catalyst, no doubt, for this for many discovering this, but not the originator. Part of the problem, as many have expressed, is that Andrew assumed 'ownership' of this and thus of his students.

³⁴ This was particularly in Foxhollow. Students in other centers did experience more independence, and the changes that did take place within Andrew in some areas in the latter years, were often felt in Europe, more than his home ground of Foxhollow.

between ego and non-ego, which played a central role not only in his teachings but also in the formation of EnlightenNext culture. Andrew was finely attuned to the human condition with its intermingling of noble and ignoble currents. He was perceptive of the human tendency to identify with these currents as being who we are and thus shaping the world we live in. Similar to other spiritual paths, his teaching addressed the fact that it is not the currents themselves but our identification with them that obstructs our capacity to know and express the Freedom that is our birthright—a Freedom in which exists the potential to see through the ‘solidity’ of conditioned patterns and self-limiting beliefs.

What became powerfully attractive to so many of us was Andrew’s conviction early on in his teaching career that Liberation was not an end in itself, nor did its ultimate significance lie only with the individual. He saw the awakening of the individual but as the precursor for creating an evolving culture based on living spiritual principles and a deeper humanity. In response to this vision, for eighteen-plus years he and we, his students, put enormous energy and attention into the development of self-awareness, ego transcendence and integration in order to create the foundation for this possibility.

From Inner Map to Ideology: The framing of our complex inner world into the simple polarity of ego and non-ego within a context of inner Freedom initially helped us to become aware of important relative distinctions regarding our motivations. We learned over many years and with the shedding of much ‘blood sweat and tears’, to recognize self-centered, primitive motives within ourselves and to see these within a larger context than that of simply our own shortcomings. In striving to learn to come together and engage with each other and with life in general with awareness and self-responsibility, this binary model or inner map was, I believe at the time, very helpful.

However, rather than being merely a tool for developing discriminating self-awareness, gradually this map took on an ideological significance becoming the basis on which our culture was built. Given the gap between what we were trying to do and the actual stage of our spiritual development at the time, this binary model, clarifying the different worlds of ego and non-ego, understandably gained enormous prominence in our lives. This also became the lens through which we evaluated and responded to *each other*. These were often overly simplistic evaluations based on whether we were perceived to be responding from ego or not. They didn’t consider a more nuanced perspective, one that took into account the multiplicity of factors that influence any one of us at any one time; nor was the issue of the maturity of those of us who were doing the evaluating really given much consideration. This model and its distinctly black-and-white criteria began to form the foundation for a crystallization of EnlightenNext’s culture into fixed social categorizations and group

identities. These tended to be laden with assumptions, more often than not, negative assumptions.

Categorization and Identity: Once any of us were put into a specific social categorization, especially if it was one outside the formal structure of students, the exclusive focus on our weaknesses made it very difficult for these not to become a painful and self-fulfilling identity. In the worst scenario, which was not uncommon, this would lead to our becoming caricatures of our own shadows, having lost touch entirely with the deeper ground and context of our work together. This was a frequent experience for many, including myself, for years. How extreme this internalization could become is reflected during a period in which Andrew was responding to my unyielding arrogance. In a ‘service’ category at the time, I was banned from participating in the spiritual life and activities of the Foxhollow community.³⁵ I remember clearly the experience of feeling grateful that I could come into the EnlightenNext offices at Foxhollow in the dead of night to clean them; offices that I had previously worked in for years in various departments and teams. This was the only time I was allowed on the property during this period – the not very subtle inference being that I was unworthy to be there at any other time. The lack of self-esteem I experienced during this period, and no doubt expressed as a result of being an outcast, created further separation with my fellow students and colleagues, thus reinforcing this vicious cycle. It took years, in my case within the context of EnlightenNext, to find my way out of this, and to rediscover a belief in myself and the spiritual passion that had shaped my life-choices since early adulthood.³⁶ This was amplified enormously for those who were condemned to remain in these categories indefinitely.

It is humbling to look back into the world’s history at large and see similar patterns in pre-modern and modern cultures where social structures were created based on subordinate/dominant dynamics. And it is to our shame that this became such a feature in the tapestry of our culture at EnlightenNext.

Casteism: The concluding and most extreme expression of this negative development reinforced, I believe, from a binary interpretation of the teachings, was a pernicious form of casteism within our culture. Crudely, this meant that those within the community were regarded as “in” (good), and those who were either

³⁵ It was the context that these things happened in that is important. Service itself was a valuable part of our lives. And *in specific circumstances* it was also a powerful practice of humility that many of us benefited from. However a service category of students was created that no doubt carried the stigma of being ‘2nd class’. This entailed doing the menial tasks only, and generally not participating in the collective spiritual practices or enquiry groups that were the center of EnlightenNext life

³⁶ This did not lead me to question Andrew’s judgment at the time. I believed this was all part of the ‘battle with ego’

expelled or who chose to leave, were regarded as “out” (bad). Both categories were supposedly defined by one’s relationship to ego and the spiritual life. Lines were drawn that had little to do with the actual spiritual depth and heart that most had demonstrated. And until recently a chasm existed between these poles based on this division that has lasted for decades. Communication between the two was effectively closed and intimate friendships and relationships were in many cases categorically ended.

The past two years have witnessed a gradual dissolution of this structure and a coming together across this divide. This has revealed the fundamental falsity of its basis and the inhumanity at its core. However, the fact that ‘casteism’ became acceptable and even ‘normal’ within our culture, with all its repercussions, is a long shadow on Andrew’s and EnlightenNext’s (my/our) history. Casteism is indefensible in any context, and personally I regard my own complicity in this structure as shameful, even more so, because I was subject to it myself.

Postscript: It’s hard for anyone who became involved in the work of EnlightenNext in the latter years to understand how this social iniquity could have developed within our collective midst from very early on. Even more critically, how it could have continued for so long? ³⁷ Many have understandably asked these questions. There is no one answer to this.³⁸ But again, it is humbling how frighteningly easy with certain conditions, these dynamics, buried in the human psyche, can be activated. That it was wrong and damaging is undeniable.

The Significance of the ‘No Problem’ Tenet

One of the underlying causes that contributed to this trajectory – from the hardening of an ideology to the practice of ego demonization to the creation of subordinate/dominant structures – was, to me, the surreptitious loss of an existential truth – that there is inherently ‘no problem’ at the core of existence itself. This timeless realization was foundational to Andrew’s early teachings, as it is to all Liberation teachings. Stemming directly from his own spiritual awakening this was undeniably communicated through his teachings and his being in the early years, generating love and trust. The intensity of Andrew’s later demonization of ego, with all its repercussions, directly contravened this subtle but profound truth. I

³⁷ Differentiation is obviously inherent to life. It was the degradation within these structures and the distortion of self they created that was, and is so destructive. There were movements to dissolve these divisions by senior students in the last few years. (See section on Changes).

³⁸ The dominant narrative was a military metaphor of those “leaving the battlefield” - i.e. that people were no longer “interested.” The more deeply involved the student was, the more Andrew’s view was one of “betrayal.”

used to think that this teaching meant there were no problems *fundamentally* in life, which was naturally hard to come to terms with! It took me some years to realize what Andrew and other spiritual traditions were pointing to: a deep inner ease born of non-separation that enables us to engage with all kinds of problems, inner and outer, large and small, *without fragmentation of Self or visceral separation from 'other'*.

Within our own history, especially in the earlier years, buoyed by the ecstatic experience of awakening to our essential nature of non-separation, a sense of 'no problem' was alive naturally between us. However, when the intensity of this experience faded and the reality of our conditioned beliefs in our separateness re-emerged, we were ill prepared for what it took to *live* from that undivided no-problem core. Thus a decade later, during the long years of ego 'purification', with none of us having developed an anchor in this dimension, this was for most of us a period of extreme existential anxiety. In this environment the sense of there being a *huge, if not insurmountable*, 'problem' was rife, and all kinds of primitive behaviors, including the rigidification of social categories was a painful legacy of this.

Spiritual Crisis as Part of the Path: Along these same lines, it's striking now that apart from the confusing admixture of motivations operating in Andrew, there was also an absence of a largesse of view on what the spiritual journey entails; most significantly the inevitability of the existential challenges or 'dark nights of the soul' that occur. For example, as we passed beyond the initial spiritual honeymoon individually and as a collective, and started to encounter our own attachment to the habitual sense of isolated selfness, the *normality* of this regression on the spiritual path was not the context we viewed this in.³⁹ In fact as we struggled with classic spiritual obstacles without an articulated context for both the enormous challenge *and* normalcy of these struggles, many of us would end up after weeks or months in a state of acute existential distress, rapidly becoming shadows of our former selves.

This, understandably, had a negative impact on a small community. And Andrew, inexperienced and not inclined to seek advice from more experienced teachers, at a loss to know what else to do in the face of this, would in some instances send us away; especially those of us who were more senior. The rationale behind this was that our presence in these specter-like states would inevitably sow insecurity and

³⁹ Ken Wilber describes this in his distinction between "states" and "stages", where the values and perspective experienced in a higher state of consciousness become transmuted into who we are over long periods of time.

doubt in the minds of younger students.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly this added to an atmosphere of apprehension of ego and any form of spiritual struggle. Rather than existential challenges being recognized for what they are and supported as such, these periods of banishment created a cycle of fear and silence with regard to important questions; natural questions as to what led to seemingly committed people leaving overnight or being sent to a distant continent for indeterminate lengths of time. It did not occur to Andrew, or any of us at the time, that there might be another way entirely; and we generally accepted this, again, as part of the 'battle with ego.' The fact that we were in the midst of an enormous experiment, the complexity and risks of which neither we (nor Andrew) had little, if any prior experience of at the time, was not really part of our awareness.

With hindsight, had the rigor and challenges of the process we were all in been articulated and open for discussion and enquiry, the jagged contours of the inner spiritual landscape we were navigating might have been embraced and even respected for what they are by all of us. This would no doubt have resulted in a lot less unhealthy suffering. Andrew's hubris in the context of the absence of a living lineage where the depth of this knowledge and perspective is usually held, I believe significantly contributed to this.

The Top-down Structure and Natural Hierarchy

Finally, with regard to the fault-lines that developed over time and erupted in the crisis of 2013, the issue of the top-down structure that constituted EnlightenNext organization is, I believe a central factor. As much as EnlightenNext grew from a fledgling community into a strong global institution, ironically it did not develop and adapt its organizational structures in any kind of fundamental way. This was not without attempts, as a line of dedicated student CEO's and creative professional consultants can attest to.

One of the fiercest eruptions within the existing 'Core' body of students at the time Andrew stepped down was the reaction to the structure of hierarchy, which he had carefully built over years. Andrew saw hierarchy as a natural phenomenon of the Life process - one that inherently supports and advances the developmental process in all its diversity. This term itself comes laden with negative associations of dominance and submission, or at the very least, conformity and compliance; so Andrew's attempts to wrest a "natural" hierarchy from this historically entrenched

⁴⁰ It was not that Andrew did not try to work with us to bring about a breakthrough. And at times this was successful. But there was little flexibility of approach much beyond unrelenting pressure within a context of censure. If this failed to produce results, Andrew's frustration would more often than not lead to punitive measures or public shaming.

dynamic, boldly went in the face of postmodernity's veneration of democracy and near allergic response to hierarchies in general. This often extends to the recognition of graduated differentiation, even respect for knowledge and experience.

Within the confines of our secluded world and our own history of having suffered and consciously worked on the human tendencies for abuse of power and position played out within ourselves and between each other in the student body, the hierarchy that existed in 2013 seemed to be largely 'working'. I, for one, assumed the problems of abusive dominance and conformity were for the most part, although not completely, over. This was an over-assumption on my part and an underestimation of how much it takes and will take for an authentic "natural" hierarchy to emerge between human beings.

Someone once remarked to me, as we were stumbling through the frigid darkness one winter's evening outside the Foxhollow kitchen dragging large waste bins across the ice towards the trash skip, that, "One of the best aspects of EnlightenNext is that as a leader in this community, one minute one is guiding a group, the next you are carrying the trash." – in other words, no exceptionalism vis a vis position. There had always been a healthy policy of everyone from the CEO to interns, from senior teachers to novices, sharing the menial tasks. On top of this, Andrew's highest expectations and also harshest responses had always been reserved for his 'senior' people at *all* periods of EnlightenNext's history, as many are familiar with. The logic of this I trusted but unbeknown to myself, this reinforced my own belief in the 'naturalness' of the hierarchical structure we were creating with its inherent pyramid authority across multiple areas of life.

Since EnlightenNext's closure I have come to see through others' eyes the fuller consequences of this thinking and to recognize that I was in fact part of a rigid hierarchical structure at EnlightenNext (in 2013); a structure that was one of dominance (even if not abusive dominance). It's become clear that far from 'natural', this was in a state of stasis, denying many involved at a core level, with years of experience, a sense of respect, shared governance and an effective voice in shaping EnlightenNext's future⁴¹ – basically, stakeholders without a real voice. This has had enormous repercussions. Over the years that which served initially to foster humility, discernment and insight, and also helped develop capacities for leadership, became restrictive and suffocating.

Locked into an inflexible edifice that perpetually regarded one as "junior" (based solely on years of involvement), was immensely frustrating and insulting for many. Disempowered with regard to their own creativity and talents, the reality of having

⁴¹ This was also the case with regard to the women of EnlightenNext for many years.

given more than a decade of their lives and service to EnlightenNext, and yet denied participation in the higher levels of decision-making of the organization, showed up in the anger and painful dispersion that occurred amongst many core students when the crisis erupted. This has been a profound lesson in the blindness of being embedded in a structure that had few external objective mechanisms. And is another example of what several consultants pointed out regarding EnlightenNext organization – the conflation of “church and state”. For those closely involved yet with no real power to change things themselves, there was little evidence to support any trust that things would be different in the future. Although many of us had worked closely together for years and shared so much, the power of a dysfunctional structure and its long-term effects created painful unbridgeable divisions at the time.

On the other side of things, this pyramid structure also meant that the burden of responsibility, both real and projected, throughout EnlightenNext’s history lay on a small group of ‘senior’ people, periodically replaced. This was not always a desirable or easy position to be in for multiple reasons, as many know. And even after twenty plus years, despite the visible maturing of the student body as a whole and having maintained that he wanted “partners not followers”, the reality was that Andrew was not willing to trust the counsel of those students who had demonstrated their commitment in countless ways—for the sake of EnlightenNext’s mission. Despite the willingness and capacity available, including that of many former students associated at the time, Andrew’s allegiance ultimately lay with his ambition and personal investment in retaining sole control at the top of what was an outdated structure

Postscript: In the last few years there were initiatives discussed amongst those of us at a senior level of EnlightenNext in different configurations around the world with regard to significantly altering the structure of the organization to one of more inclusivity and representation. But the fact that it was largely the most senior level of the student body that was formally engaged in these discussions indicates the degree that we (as senior students) were embedded in this structure itself. In retrospect, despite significant developmental strides and so much having been learned, the unyielding structure of the guru paradigm with its ossified hierarchical structures made radical cultural change from within, at the time, regrettably almost impossible.

Section 3: Why I Stayed

A question put to me personally from a diversity of sources over the past eighteen months, especially from those who left years ago, has been, “Why did you stay? “ In

reflecting more deeply on this, there are many dimensions to this question as to why I (or many of us) stayed on at EnlightenNext through the various and often very difficult phases of our history. Some of the reasons are overt but it's hard to separate these from the very process that we couldn't see for most of the time, but were part of together.

Life at EnlightenNext was defined, almost for as long as I remember, by contrasting realities. My initial meeting with Andrew was one of simultaneous pure inspiration *and* fearful recoil. The paradoxes within my own experience and relationship with him as my teacher have been echoed at every level of life within EnlightenNext. Below are a few of the many events and stages that unfolded over the years and the changes that ensued which no doubt constituted my staying....This was my life.

Staying or Leaving

Whether those of us involved with Andrew and/or EnlightenNext, especially from earlier years, either stayed or left, has been a huge and, for the most part, an emotionally charged and divisive issue. However for many of us intimately involved, no matter what our ultimate choice has been, the issue of staying or leaving Andrew as our spiritual teacher and EnlightenNext as our spiritual family and 'co-creative laboratory', has probably been a decision we wrestled with at least once.

Amidst heated speculation at times, the argument has gone back and forth regarding our being villains or moral heroes for either position. But it's not that simple. I have come to appreciate the many different reasons we make the choices we do in life and the factors that influence this. There are real and diverse reasons people chose to leave or stay at different times throughout EnlightenNext's history. However, in hearing others' experiences, my sense is that for most of us whose lives were fused with Andrew's and/or the community's in a utopian vision rooted in the experience of 'god' or Love, and who were committed to actualizing this in a collective context, this has been a fundamental choice, *either* way. Even if the choice to leave felt like blind survival, it was at the least a choice that was the most honest and authentic to oneself at the time, simply because of the enormity of the decision and what it involved. Whatever the context, given how deep our connection to Andrew and to each other was, and in many cases is, leaving was heart-wrenching, at least at some stage of that process for probably most everyone, imprinting a hole in all our souls for years, including those remaining.

Leaving a Spiritual Teacher: Severing, or being forced to sever one's relationship with one's spiritual teacher, spiritual community, life purpose, and in many cases life partner, is traumatic, especially if you are alone, which in this circumstance most were. There is no way of preparing for this trauma or its effects.

Sitting alone in a central London park after being expelled from the Center and community there ten years after meeting Andrew, I recall life exploding around me in all its unruly beauty; but it seemed eerily monochromatic. It was as if a primary circuit had been unplugged within me, frighteningly disconnecting me from the very life force I was witnessing. Loneliness descended like heavy cloak. Having spent the previous ten years in close community, three of these in a rich and intimate relationship with my partner, this was an alien experience. Pulling myself into a tight ball on that park bench I withdrew further, survival instincts taking over.

Whether intermediary or representing a permanent break, variations on this experience have been familiar to many. Usually there was no former life to return to. Family, friends, even those from previous spiritual circles, cannot reach us in this place, a place we are truly alone. Like others, I found relief in numbness – the only way, at least initially, that I could function in the world. A close friend of mine once described this as literally ‘putting one foot in front of the other.’ My sphere of attention became drastically reduced to basic survival issues: finding accommodation, acquiring work outside EnlightenNext, creating some kind of financial security, plus in my case, taking care of my daughter in the midst of this crisis, who thankfully was away when this happened.

For many of us this would be just the beginning. Although ‘excommunicated’ Andrew would keep up a relentless stream of intense tactics to induce our egos to ‘break’, having those closest to him at the time carry these out.⁴² These often had the reverse effect of catalyzing a deeper withdrawal psychically and emotionally into a mode of self –protection, or occasionally defiant rebellion. Looking back, I believe, many years were lost in this state. My peers (most of them close friends) and I were the first generation to experience this. It was unfortunately repeated in the next generation of formal (core) students. As a result, the low-cost motels and guesthouses in the area surrounding Foxhollow are familiar to many of this era. Some of us spent weeks at a time leading a nomadic existence, going from one motel to another not wanting to attract attention to ourselves in a small rural community. Our hope was of returning any day to Foxhollow. If no radical epiphany occurred to release us from this limbo state, eventually we would end up renting cheap rooms in the area. Demeaning, financially and spiritually draining, this sadly led to a gradual exodus of students that was permanent.

Although much of this period to me was fraught with reprehensible incidents that impeded students’ development (including my own), if not worse, the other side of my experience over the course of years was Andrew’s fierce call from early on to be

⁴² In later years these reprehensible ‘tactics’, often embellished by Andrew’s dark humor and in some cases leading to cruel mockery by students he selected to carry these out, completely ended.

true to our highest aspirations, knowledge and experience in the face of whatever emotional states or neuroses were arising. This taught me over time to embrace and see beyond the fear, rage and humiliation that were both justifiable and non-justifiable. In this way like so many of us, I came to know and wrestle with aspects of myself I was previously barely aware of and learned to walk through fire for what I cared about. I ultimately grew to trust my deepest awareness of ‘god’, that Fullness of Being or Love (however we describe this) as my ultimate reference point for life (over and beyond Andrew). That this began to occur within a collective, with all the potential in developing this, is why I stayed.

I do not subscribe to ‘ends justifying means’. Abuse is never justifiable. As discussed, many who left found integrity and an independence of self in their lives outside of EnlightenNext through very different paths. The sense of ‘walking through fire’ occurred in very different ways. It took courage and independence for many to leave, especially in an environment that saw this as “betrayal”. Tragically some have not recovered from the trauma of their experience. What has become clear to many others, and myself, is that there is no *single* outcome to EnlightenNext’s history. For women and men discovering the teachings of evolutionary enlightenment fifteen plus years or so into this utopian experiment, some of whom went on to become formal (core) students themselves, it’s hard to relate to much of what has been written about the earlier years; or the anger and grief that can stay with a person indefinitely through having had their trust in Life at a fundamental level violated by their teacher. By the late 2000’s with the lessons absorbed and changes that gradually took place, including the shift in focus of our work together, excommunications were a rare occurrence.

Staying: My Reasons: For those of us who stayed, at least for myself, despite my inner conflict at times, it was in a way a ‘choiceless’ choice. By this I do not mean that it was not intentional but there was a compulsion within myself to realize the vision and potential of our *collective* work together that kept me within EnlightenNext. My passion for Spirit was ignited long before meeting Andrew. But its fuller implications and potential for culture, through the experiments of a collective, were clearly formulated during my time with Andrew and with the women and men I shared these years with; women and men for whom I have great love. It is also my experience that the training I had, for better or worse, as Andrew’s student contributed to this.

Another equally compelling reason is that having witnessed many of my closest friends give *everything* of themselves and then end up either leaving in terrible circumstances, or being forced to remain in exile, I have been aware a lot of (figurative) blood has been spilled for an ideal that is unimaginably Good and significant but went terribly askew in the process of attempting to actualize it. Likewise having given the majority of my adult life to this endeavor myself, I have

felt strongly, and still do, that this *mean* something; that the unabridged sincerity and trust with which so many people gave completely, and the LOVE and radical willingness to actualize this utopian vision, be honored by something positive emerging as a result. *By this, I do not mean that staying within the fold of EnlightenNext was the only way that this could occur.* But it is the way I chose. Having spent years alone on my own pursuing spiritual awakening, the ideal and implications of an evolving awakened *collective*, plus the relationships I developed (and continue to have) within this context, is what kept pulling me back. ⁴³

Additionally, as a woman, women's Liberation and participation in shaping the world we are part of, in real partnership with men, became an objective I felt and feel passionate about. I wanted (and still do) to see and help make this happen with other women within a shared context of inner Freedom. Within the extremes that our relationships have endured, I could never have imagined the bonds that have emerged through what we have shared. ⁴⁴

Women's liberation was no longer a matter of my own independence, which I had explored for years prior to meeting Andrew. It was more about the cultural potential for men and women based on the inner Liberation of both genders that I was, and am, deeply drawn to.

Early in 1996 I was fortunate to meet and speak for in-depth with Vimala Thakur in her home in Mt Abu, India. This was before my own 'dark night of the soul' and entering a decade of existential crisis. We spoke for three unbroken hours together and Vimala's towering example of grace, intelligence, dignity and strength, plus the impactful life she lived on multiple fronts, made a deep impression on me as that of a truly awakened woman. This stayed with me through the challenging years that followed and greatly impacted our work as women in EnlightenNext.

Finally, and perhaps most significant in my staying and continuing to work within the context of EnlightenNext, is that I trusted Andrew at a *fundamental* level of motivation. I was not unaware of his faults or even that he went too far. And as described above, my conviction in the structure of absolute surrender to the guru went through a profound change when I realized that Andrew was not immune from acting on dark impulses that he seemed to be largely unconscious of. But I trusted his spiritual integrity at a fundamental level. This past year has revealed to me the extent of the impact of Andrew's personal shadows, even on this. I have come to see

⁴³ For others, I appreciate leaving was a true response to a situation they no longer trusted; and the only way to fulfill the same drive for a sense of self or Life purpose, for all of us relationship was the essence of our work, which is why we effected each other so deeply.

⁴⁴ See section on The Women of EnlightenNext

directly that overly extreme actions taken by Andrew were far from always enacted in the context of a higher purpose but were too often acts of personal abuse of power, including vindictiveness. Lastly I believed that Andrew's knowledge of the human psyche and his capacity to articulate a path for spiritual development came not only from his powerful enlightenment, but also from a degree of self-knowledge acquired through personal experience. On this I was wrong.

This has come at incalculable human cost. Attempting to come to terms with all this has greatly impacted my own position with regard to the guru paradigm itself and the need for a much deeper enquiry into what this serves, how its function – *if it continues at all* – could possibly be fulfilled in very different forms in a post traditional world.

However, with regard to my staying, as others have found their existential autonomy outside of EnlightenNext, for me it was within EnlightenNext. This has been my crucible – the source of deep spiritual inspiration, Love, and learning, as well as despair and shame. Over the years through the intensity of focus of our work together on creating an awakened collective, many of us found an existential independence within ourselves⁴⁵. What this meant was that we experienced an autonomous creativity that in its best moments was naturally and simply in alignment with a larger field of consciousness. This began to be actualized in various forums (for myself this ranged from our women's holons, the educational work (teaching partnerships), and the Education team I was part of. These were independent of Andrew; in fact we were able to keep this 'unity in creative diversity' that was occurring between us largely free of his sometimes disruptive behavior. Ironically although almost the entire tenure of his spiritual leadership was dedicated to the potential of a collective, Andrew himself was unable to participate in this. His attachment to being 'the one' always proved too strong.

Postscript: In many areas during the last few years, those of us more senior, both in the US and UK, frequently challenged Andrew with regard to his views and actions.⁴⁶ In some cases he did listen and respond but sadly this was the exception. We also attempted to establish forums for open discourse with Andrew with a wider representation of his student body. Again, some changes did occur as a result of this, especially in his relationship with those in Europe and India. Although at the

⁴⁵ See Independence from the Guru

⁴⁶ For myself and other senior women one of the areas we particularly challenged Andrew on was his patriarchal attitude to women.

time there was so much that was not in our view, I and others did believe change could come from within.⁴⁷

The Culture of Practice

From the years spent living and doing intensive inner work so closely together with others, for which I am very grateful, I am also dispossessed of romantic ideas that a utopian vision regarding humanity is a given. Nor do I hold the view that it will occur simply as the result of the powerful spiritual awakening of an individual or a collective. There are no doubt many factors involved but one of which I am convinced is spiritual practice. Although Andrew's teaching was about the collective, the delicate infrastructure of this depended, and depends, on the maturity and autonomy of each individual.

Spiritual practice, as mentioned previously, became the backbone of EnlightenNext community. As formal students, we all did two hours of meditation daily at Foxhollow. Sundays were kept as a full retreat day in silence. As part of our culture, we also all attended an annual residential intensive retreat of ten- twenty days (for those working within the US with its draconian policy of two weeks annual leave, this was no small feat!). Where possible, we also spent a week doing a silent self-retreat in our own time, usually over Christmas and New Year. As much as was practical this was replicated throughout the centers worldwide. And in addition, forums for focused enquiry into our personal and collective development, as well as philosophical explorations in small mentored groups, were a regular feature of our lives. This rigorous and—by contemporary postmodern standards—austere life represented an enormous commitment and personal passion that I have no doubt contributed to the coherence of depth many describe as their experience of those involved with EnlightenNext (from whatever era, whether having left or stayed).

Both women and men were also engaged in spiritual practices that were specific to individuals or small groups. These were either self-generated or given by Andrew. Going beyond the parameters of our selves through doing intensive spiritual practice was central to our inner work, especially during the more formative years of the community.

These powerful traditional and non-traditional practices, as many know, can be very challenging, especially within a western context of hyper-individualism where our orientation towards having the freedom to do what *we want* to do has primacy.

⁴⁷ In looking back, far too much time and energy was spent in often fruitless debilitating 'battles' with Andrew that eventually had the effect of disaffecting most of his more senior students. Many of who have gone on to develop their own work based on years of experience.

Designed to take one beyond the self-imposed and self-enclosing limitations, fears, and the neuroses of our minds, these practices confronted us with the full range of the 'stuff' of ourselves - our motivations and tendencies both conscious and unconscious. No matter what the practice, *letting go* was always the ultimate portal to going beyond and ultimately integrating inner division. In this context for example, many of us completed hundreds of thousands of prostrations.

My Own Experience: In the first weeks of my doing prostrations, of which I had had no prior experience, I was inspired and full of energy. However as the practice developed, like others, I started to encounter raw layers of my self I had not anticipated, nor could I 'control'! Stripped of familiar modes of defense and mundane distractions, I felt exposed to myself. Boredom, the temptation to 'cheat', raging resistance, and escapist fantasies of sensual pleasure and/or clandestine relationships would spring to life in the solitude of my mind. Most challenging of all was the experience of *getting nothing for myself*.

The days turned into months. Learning to *not* resist any of it, to refrain from my attachment to making a problem, especially making a problem of aspects of myself that didn't match my self-image, was far more intense than I could have imagined. Learning to *keep going regardless* was a humbling experience. It was also a great gift...Alone with 'god', there were to my mind, only three options – give up, drive oneself crazy with half-heartedness, or surrender. With mind and motives rendered so transparent to yourself, with no audience or external arbiter, you are truly your own master. Doing these practices for long periods of time did effect profound changes in many of us. And given how intimately we knew each other, this was deeply moving to witness.

Extreme Practices: Along with this daily regimen of spiritual practice there were also the now well-documented and highly controversial extreme practices that Andrew at times had us do in specific groups or alone, or that we elected to do ourselves. In this arena, the line between coercion and free will is a delicate and questionable one, and one that was undoubtedly blurred at EN, especially when it involved a group. In retrospect, the *motive* behind these practices and the nature of the context in which they occurred, especially those given by Andrew, contributed to a large degree, I believe, to the outcome being either positive or negative.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ As discussed earlier, where Andrew's motive was punitive or to humiliate, the train of inner and outer turmoil this triggered would create havoc with the delicate process of trust and development. (**See Love and Abuse**). But where Andrew's motive was to catalyze transformation and confidence and we shared this objective, the results were powerful, and deeply positive. e.g. 2006 women's retreat in Monserrat see below.

Free-will: The issue of free-will and its complexities have been debated for centuries and still is a provocative and open area of enquiry. However, our capacity for conscious choice, within the parameters of our limited self-awareness, is precious. In the unique relationship with a guru, one consciously gives over of one's 'external freedom', including to a large degree the freedom for self-choice, in the context of developing inner freedom. For highly individuated modern and postmodern women and men this is no small thing and, as discussed earlier, carries enormous responsibility with regard to purity of motivation on the part of the guru.

In my own journey with Andrew, as he is the only person I ever surrendered my prerogative for choice to, this has been a source of deep internal debate at times. At this point, living with choices I have made and continue to make, including when they have been wrong, knowing I made them and I am the one who can learn from my own mistakes, has been hugely liberating and sustained my sense of 'owning' my own life. The times I have felt I have betrayed myself and therefore others, has been when I made a choice knowingly (even half consciously!) to save my own skin – i.e. to fit in, placate, or bend to pressure. Understanding and owning this itself, has been and is part of my own journey.

Coercion: Doing extreme practices together, as a collective, inevitably risks the experience of coercion. To be 'forced' i.e. to have no real option to question or *not* participate in something one doesn't want to do or doesn't feel right about, for whatever reason, imparts a sense of violation. The extreme practices that were an integral part of our culture for a period of time (involving both men and women) were no doubt at times strengthening but they were also complicated by the lack of freedom of choice and unspoken pressure to conform. To not participate in a collective practice, no matter what it was, was largely unacceptable. Fear of being seen as weak, not being 'on mission', not 'committed', even the threat of being thrown out, were very real sentiments held in the noosphere of EnlightenNext. To me *this*, as much as specific situations themselves, is what created a sense of coercion and of having one's autonomy violated. This was exacerbated within the women's student body by centuries of subordinate/dominate dynamics⁴⁹

For many years I stayed away from groups. I valued my independence and didn't see the value in surrendering my own will to a group or to a guru.⁵⁰ It was the vision of an awakened collective, interacting beyond ego, that opened my eyes to the potential of an evolving *matrix* of Intelligence and depth, one that was greater than the sum of its parts; one that could potentially serve any context. Questions of what that meant in relation to participating in the 'life' of such a group became very real

⁴⁹ See section on The Women at EnlightenNext below.

⁵⁰ See section on student –teacher relationship.

and continue to this day. I have been involved in collective endeavors at EnlightenNext that have spun out of control in destructive ways (vis a vis *Lord of the Flies*), and I have also been part of collective practices and endeavors that have not only been unifying and liberating, but also taken us to greater levels of consciousness and capacity. This begs the very real question as to what makes the difference? Within EnlightenNext it was less complicated when any of us came up with or elected to do something of an extreme nature ourselves for a specific goal, and infinitely more challenging when this would come from Andrew. This was aggravated for those of us who were women students by Andrew's increasingly sexist attitude and tendency towards a culture of machismo. This muddied the picture and in time severely strained our trust.⁵¹

The Women at EnlightenNext

Andrew's relationship to his women students is extremely controversial for very real reasons. This is an entire topic within itself, which requires its own in-depth exploration, which I am not attempting here.

In 1989 however he wrote what was for me a groundbreaking piece on women and men called *Liberation without a Face*. Despite the image of facelessness that the title of this article unfortunately conveys, the vision contained in this personally changed my life. Not identifying myself specifically as a "feminist" up to that point, although a feminist in spirit, I was compelled by the vision of women and men liberated from their respective gender *identifications* yet being free as women and as men.⁵² To me this went beyond the concept of gender equality. Years of deep enquiry into what those unconscious conditioned gender identifications are that inhibit a liberated expression of either gender followed this seminal piece.⁵³

There are conflicting views on this but at the time it was my experience that the perceptions of structural patterns at the level of self in women (and likewise those

⁵¹ This got to the point where for many women this trust was destroyed altogether resulting in their leaving.

⁵² This would now include LGBT

⁵³ Women have come together in all kinds of ways for millennia, no doubt including existentially, and women have been and are doing radical development work outside of EnlightenNext. This is not a claim to exclusivity. Within the context of our EnlightenNext's mission of working with consciousness in the context of culture, our experience of struggling with an existential intimacy (confirmed by other women) resulted in a deep journey together for years. Andrew's lack of respect for the seriousness with which the women were deconstructing the dynamics of the status quo of patriarchy within ourselves, with all its ensuing messiness, led to the women ultimately making greater strides, I believe, in this entrenched dynamic and finding an independence that was free of the guru paradigm.

operating in men) that Andrew recognized were not initially made in a derogatory context, but rather were the observations of a teacher looking toward the greater liberation of both genders. Much of the inner work we developed, alone and together as women, was in relation to these culturally constructed inner structures. Initially, Andrew's vision, as laid out in *Liberation without a Face*, was free of any sexist inferences regarding the myth of a fundamental inequality between women and men. In fact, the context of this piece was the reality that consciousness itself is not gendered! But what ensued was a huge disparity in the level of enquiry engaged in by the men's and women's groups within the student body respectively, under Andrew's aegis. This resulted in a revivification and intensification of outdated patriarchal structures and attitudes within EnlightenNext, most prominently embodied by Andrew. Ironically given his initial insights and desire to see greater emancipation of *both* sexes, his own unexamined male structures of superiority, arrogance, and dominance in time viscerally reinforced the traditional false and damaging patriarchal assumption that women have an inherent 'problem' and are spiritually inferior.

In our context (EnlightenNext) this played out over the years in very destructive ways, ultimately destroying many women's trust in Andrew's capacity as a spiritual teacher and, for some, their trust in themselves. Issues of coercion, fear, and public shaming became big ones within the women's student body and complicated our capacity to work with real patterns developed over millennia of dominant / subordinate dynamics; patterns that were inhibitive of our innate Freedom. Not only this, but for the men at EnlightenNext, most of whom had either been schooled in the feminist revolution of the sixties or raised with postmodern values of gender equality prior to meeting Andrew, this environment was retrogressive as revealed in their complicit silence in what became an obvious imbalance in their teacher's treatment of men and women, especially in more extreme situations where women were no less than bullied and/or publicly shamed.

There is much more to say on this topic but, with regard to the extreme practices mentioned above where some of the most controversial infractions occurred, it is important also that it be known there were initiatives that came from *within* the women's collective, that were motivated by a positive intention to unify and strengthen us, and succeeded in doing this. Despite the overall gestalt we were working in, to me this is significant in that these initiatives coming from women, break the single narrative regarding the body of women students at EnlightenNext as being completely under Andrew's jurisdiction, with no mind or spirit of our own. There was, amidst the patriarchal constraints of superiority and dominance, a real and unbroken thread throughout the years of women's self-determination, self-

enquiry, and courage⁵⁴. From meetings with some women who left EnlightenNext it is clear that this continued in different ways in different contexts. Likewise within EnlightenNext this developed and strengthened, until finally it was out of the collective women's body of students, *not* Andrew, that the 'women's teachings' emerged, based on our own experience – the work and lessons we had learned, alone and together, over twenty years. This was eventually articulated, as “The Ten Agreements for Evolving Women”. The independent spirit of enquiry, exploration and development of women's strength and capacities, freed of internalized patriarchal assumptions and the complex imprint on women's psyche these have had, is continuing amongst many of the women involved in multiple contexts.

The Maturation of the Collective

It's always hard to assess 'change' as it rarely comes clean-cut, especially with regard to human beings, and in the case of EnlightenNext even more so. Changes within the focused environment we were in did not alter some of the shameful structures previously discussed (see Casteism), which can, and does understandably, leave their value open to question. But in considering the question, “Why did I stay?” changes and the development of the collective were a big part of this.

The events described below, with their revelatory breakthroughs and painful regressions, give a sense of what the trajectory our life and work was taking. To me, they are part of a stream of events that speak to the process-like nature of change itself that we are all subject to, whoever we are. Where I most directly and consciously experienced this was in the work we did as women, together. I also experienced these changes in my relationship with my male friends and peers and in the spirited innovative team that existed within the education department, of which I was co-director. This 'stream' within EnlightenNext organization created its own student-led education programs outside of the guru paradigm.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ As with almost all areas of EnlightenNext's history, there were paradoxes within Andrew's relationship to his women students. He would always assert that we were the only ones who could determine women's expression of Liberation, that as a man, he could not do this. Ironically when our own work began to develop and flourish, Andrew's patriarchal conditioning often undermined this.

⁵⁵ This consisted of various seminars and a comprehensive four-year program, both philosophical and experiential in nature. Created, taught and mentored by students of sixteen plus years, the syllabus was interactive and explorative with an emphasis on group enquiry. These programs reflected our own insights and learning gleaned from the lessons and experience of the past decades. They were designed for people outside the guru-student structure. The Education Stream also had its own separate budget and financial accountability within EnlightenNext. Little known is that in the final years it operated completely free of the donation structure and became financially sustainable. Ironically in April 2013, EnlightenNext auditors were the most positive with regard to EnlightenNext Inc.'s financial progress and prognosis they had been in years. This was the result of years of hard work by dedicated teams.

We all have specific moments in our lives that represent a sea-change in our own or in the consciousness of the 'culture' we are part of. It may take years to 'metabolize', to become who we *are*, but there is ultimately no going back from that knowing beyond thought that a new possibility is real. To my mind, one of Andrew's, and our mistakes was our lack of appreciation and humility for what it takes to sustain and internalize deep structural shifts in our consciousness. To expect regressions and to build the delicate internal structures to support those shifts, takes time and enormous heart. Instead, when 'regressions' inevitably occurred, life at EnlightenNext, especially within the core student body, would revert to a 'crisis' state again with the emergent revelation often not resurfacing for months, if not years.

The Development of the Collective: Although the foundation of EnlightenNext's work lay in the explosion of awakened heart and consciousness that found expression through the collective as early as 1987, there were multiple significant breakthroughs that contributed to the ongoing development of this at different stages of EnlightenNext's history. The first of these occurred amongst a group of novice women during a ten-day retreat in southern France in 1999. This occurred again within a 'lay' group of women on this same retreat a year later and was sustained for months. These breakthroughs took the form of a collective enlightened state of consciousness shared simultaneously by the whole group, creating a dynamic field between them of both profound ease of being and insight and clarity.

A year later the extensively documented collective awakening, similar in nature, occurred amongst a large group of men students at Foxhollow in 2001. This was distinct in the number of people involved (about thirty-five men) and the fact that this was not a spontaneous 'eruption'. It came out of intensive conditions consciously created by Andrew who was working directly with these men over months. They too were on retreat at the time, meeting together in the evenings in an intensive enquiry. The powerful group awakening actually took place when Andrew was traveling outside the country. But most significant was the fact that those involved were conscious of what was happening as it was occurring. In the days and weeks following this other students traveled to Foxhollow from Europe and were quickly absorbed into the 'field'. Over the ensuing months this experience spread through the entire student body.

The refinement and stabilization of the process of collective emergence through ongoing enquiry and spiritual practice went on for the remaining decade with various significant moments, and their often-painful setbacks, occurring within different levels of the student body. Below are some of those moments and their impact at the time.

The Breakthrough at Montserrat, 2006: In the early summer of 2006 the women’s student body at Foxhollow was under great pressure to make a further leap. I remember thirty or so of us, after a long day of focused discussions together, standing in a circle that evening in a car park outside a restaurant nestled in the hills of Massachusetts countryside. With our arms linked closely around each other, we committed ourselves to not breaking this ‘circle’. I recall the feeling of intense responsibility *and* vague anxiety. The gnawing sense that somehow I didn’t know what it would take to *not* ‘break it’ was lurking in the background of my consciousness. As one of the ‘leaders’ held responsible for repeatedly breaking “it”, I always had the sense I didn’t quite know what “it” was. But that steamy summer evening with mosquitoes swarming around our legs as we stood quietly intent together, despite the anxiety, there was nowhere else I wanted to be! A month later I returned to the breathtakingly beautiful, rugged mountain slopes of the Montserrat Monastery in Spain for EnlightenNext’s annual ten-day intensive retreat. I consciously put aside the memories of the previous year.⁵⁶

The group of women gathered there had all self selected to come. We were from different parts of Europe and the States. We knew we had a mission together and that a lot was riding on this retreat. Andrew spoke briefly to us on the first day, instructing us that we were to “move forward” every day, even if it was only fractionally. Under no circumstances were we to regress. There were no other instructions on ‘what to do’ or ‘how’ to do this, but something powerful was confirmed. *We were alone, and it was up to us.* The group was made up of about twenty women of ranging years of experience of our work at EnlightenNext – from those involved for only a few years right through to those of us involved for up to twenty years. We were all formal students. Each day we met for three hours, the rest of the time we were on silent retreat. There was a full schedule - meditation, chanting, and talks by Andrew. The dark halls and open stone vistas of the monastery were a fitting backdrop to the intensity of focus of the retreat.

I cannot recall the content of our discussions but there was a powerful unanimity between us. Not a breath of ambiguity separated us from our resolve, and the habitual waves of insecurity that would roll in periodically, simply rolled back off that rock of intention in our hearts. Rooted in something within and beyond ourselves, we were not looking outside of ourselves; Andrew’s abstaining from giving us guidance only deepened this. Not one woman was leaning on anyone else or being carried by the group, yet we gained strength from the powerful unity generated by each other’s commitment. We all had a place in that circle each day that only we could fill, and we knew it... The circle was ‘unbroken’ for the entire ten days. Thrilling, terrifying, unknown in where it would lead, a single living thread of

⁵⁶ See section on Love, Power and Abuse

enquiry developed between us that we built on day after day. Our discussions were far from abstract, yet possessed an intellectual rigor and intimate clarity that was permeated with the depth and soul of each woman. The result was that we were *together*, powerfully unified, and the unspoken trust that built day after day between us empowered our own *autonomy*. By day three or four of the retreat we recognized that we were in a process that we were both *receptive to* and *agents of* simultaneously – a process indivisible from ourselves.

For the women at Montserrat in that circle personal independence was not new. But we all, including Andrew, recognized this retreat as the emergence of a profound autonomy, free of ego, occurring within a union of existential togetherness. Over the ten days despite the inner dramas, the doubts that gnawed at the edges of our consciousness in the privacy of our own minds and the fear of not-knowing each time we entered that circle, we stayed focused, alone, yet deeply connected. Motivated by a powerful sense of responsibility to the whole, to our collective development as women, we were able to demonstrate to ourselves (primarily) that ultimately we were not afraid of our minds or emotions. What resulted was an unprecedented trust and confidence that transcended hierarchical divisions.

After the retreat we descended to the plains of Barcelona, and on calling our ‘sisters’ in Foxhollow from a crowded noisy phone booth, despite the poor line, the essence and joy of what occurred was transmitted. This had an immediate and positive impact on the consciousness of the women’s student body as a whole. This lasted for months but sadly, Andrew, who was initially supportive, used it ultimately to divide us. I deeply regret that I, and we allowed him to ‘hijack’ this with his “in” and “out” battle-like mentality leaving some women ultimately feeling more estranged and ‘failing’. This to me is the shadow of this time and again reflects that immaturity of both Andrew and those of us involved where breakthroughs amongst any group of individuals were often used as a measure, that if not ‘lived up to’ immediately, more often than not, led to exclusion.

However, although this breakthrough in the context of a collective, like those before it, took years to work together, the fact that ‘regressions’ occurred, to me does not detract from its significance or the courage of the women overall at the time, whether they were present at this retreat or not. To me this is further evidence of the reality that our /human development is indeed a process, a humbling process that takes *time* with its steps forward and its steps back – one that continues.

March 2010: In 2010 several significant events occurred within the women’s student body. These took place within different groups, at different ‘levels’ of the ‘hierarchy’ at the time. The first was in March 2010 amongst what was then called the Resolute women.

This was an emergence in consciousness that came out of these women's own desire to come together in a Liberated context and had its unique character. Each woman made the decision to "drop" her "weapons" with each other. As dramatic and strange as this may sound, it was very real. They were daring to refrain *completely* from any act of separation, superiority or undermining between them – gross or subtle. This was not based on avoidance but, on the contrary, it demanded a level of self-honesty, a willingness to renounce defensive/aggressive reactions, and the courage to be able to do this. The sincerity and unanimity of this commitment opened up a field of trust between them that was visibly transformative. Free of the subtle defensive guards we erect between us as human beings, a confidence, clarity and generosity of being poured through each one of these women in ways unique to their own character. It was stunning, undeniable to the whole student body and greatly inspiring.

Andrew was thrilled and fully supportive initially of this emergence with its very conscious and self-directed roots. However as the months went by and the women grew stronger and freer, he began to use this as a weapon against those of us who were more 'senior'. "Why was the hierarchy inverted? Were we not humiliated?" he would ask with increasing intensity. This inevitably created humiliation and division despite ourselves, and so when some six months later this emergent consciousness between the Resolute women started to crack and old patterns of separation, pride etc. began to re-activate, we were unable to authentically offer much help. And Andrew rather than supporting the women through this very natural 'regression', responded with frustration and skepticism. This was profoundly undermining and the women involved never recovered the level of natural confidence they had won through their own efforts.

Postscript: Always inspiring as a visionary, a speaker and a writer, one of the weaknesses in Andrew's capacity as a *teacher* was his tendency to pit one group against another, especially within the body of his closest students. His rationale was that this would inspire or humiliate the other to follow suite, but inevitably this created division in ways that severely inhibited both development and a natural unity from forming across hierarchical and gender lines.

Similar to this line of thinking Andrew also had a predilection towards creating "evolutionary crises" What is an "evolutionary crisis"? Does pressure have a place in the spiritual journey? These are valid and important questions in the light of what has occurred within spiritual communities, not just EnlightenNext. And as discussed earlier, whatever position we may have on this question, the motive of the guru figure especially, is critical to the outcome. And, as it was in the case of Andrew, this can be contradictory, complicated and profoundly compromised by the teacher's own shadows.

Independence From the Guru: In the stream of large and small events that shaped the fabric of our lives, one that altered my relationship to life, and to Andrew as my teacher, took place in the latter years with two of my closet peers. By this time a lot had taken place since the very early years of our journey as women in EnlightenNext (a story in itself). Changes within us individually and collectively had occurred both despite and because of the environment we were in. Although by the end of the decade (2010) we were independent in our inner work collectively as women, Andrew, as our teacher, did not desist from pushing those of us who were more senior to continually extend our boundaries. What was significantly different, however, to earlier years was that under pressure we did not fragment amongst ourselves.

One day, after weeks of intensive work together, Andrew requested that three of us who were most senior in years, formally meet with him. Each of us had been with him as our teacher for over twenty years. He laid out, as he always did, the responsibility we held to break the ceiling we were ‘imposing’ on everyone else through our ‘stuckness’. He then gave us an ultimatum – to make the leap that was needed or to *finally* leave. At first I thought he had to be joking! But it was clear Andrew meant it.

As this dawned I remember taking these words in from a very different place. The panic that similar threats of expulsion in the past had evoked did not arise. Nor was I, nor any of us, impelled to make any attempt to come up with a new ‘strategy’ for the situation or convince Andrew of our intention/sincerity etc. Instead a strange sense of confidence in *us*, in women, free of needing anything, welled up within. I remember quietly and deliberately saying to Andrew that we would take care of it. There was no fear or strong emotion of any kind evident in any one of us. The relentless engagement with *‘how’* we were going to ‘succeed’ had dropped away completely. Despite the seriousness of the situation, I remember feeling strangely at peace. Andrew unexpectedly, responded in kind. The formidable stance of unrelenting pressure and frustration similarly dropped away and he responded very simply, “Do whatever you have to.”

That night the three of us drove to Boston from Foxhollow. We stayed in a hotel together. The atmosphere in the car was charged – we argued, laughed, cried, talked, and were silent together. Whatever remaining barriers existed between us were gone; something deeper than our anxieties, our ‘convictions’, our ideas of ourselves or each other, was present between us. The sense of a ‘problem’, a fundamental problem, mysteriously disappeared and over the next forty-eight hours a different order of relationship, confidence and not-knowing blossomed between us.

During the following weeks this opened up within the entire formal women's body, manifesting in different ways in various peer 'holonic' groups.⁵⁷

What actually happened is hard to pinpoint. Andrew would often refer to the 'x factor' in spiritual breakthroughs but my own conclusions are that our *own* commitment and work, both because of and in spite of the pressure over years, opened up the absolute Trust inherent at our core as human beings, and in this case as women. There was a profound *letting go of all of it*, including ironically, *the struggle to try to be different*. The message of fundamental inferiority instilled by millennia of patriarchy rang hollow and deeply untrue.

Development needed for women *and* men? – Yes. But women having a fundamental handicap? – No.

Changes in Our Relationship to Ego: Perhaps one of the most significant changes that occurred in latter years was that 'ego' was no longer the center of attention, nor did it carry the status of pariah. A shift had occurred in our own relationship to ego where we recognized this to be an integral aspect of our humanity; one to be recognized and integrated rather than feared and isolated. This was largely due to the fact that something else was, and had taken precedence in our consciousness. As those participating in the EnlightenNext Education programs in the last few years know, the focus of our attention was on what is *possible between us* and *how* to bring this about, rather than on any one individual or anyone's ego.

Within the holons (small peer groups) obstacles both inner and outer were largely seen and related to within a developmental context. Our attention became more attuned to the *process* of any given situation rather than on ourselves or each other as 'outside' of it. Those of us who had been students together for years began to experience a deeper order of friendship where we disagreed and engaged freely together (even philosophically!) without the influence of subtle power structures with their insidious pressure to conform or 'get it right', but simply find out. Although differences were heated at times they lacked divisiveness and/or personal acrimony. The term we used to distinguish this was "creative friction".

Given the size, and variation of experience within the student body this shift in relationship to ego was not always experienced but the days of being ostracized or exiled for months or years for misdemeanors of the 'ego' were largely over. The next generation of formal students rarely if ever, experienced the demonization of ego in this way.

⁵⁷ These breakthroughs are not exclusive to EnlightenNext, but they were for us significant steps in our journey together. Understanding our experience was as important to us as the experience itself

Contradictions: At the same time as these changes were occurring there were many people who were still in a position of having been ostracized for years and the destructive nature of EnlightenNext's culture of casteism was still in tact. Most significantly Andrew's investment in being a kind of medieval monarch did not alter despite the changing circumstances in the student body around him. For many this has understandably put into question the hard-won changes that did occur within EnlightenNext. However, what is little known is that as senior students developed their own work independent of Andrew, yet born of the collective endeavor of years, and began to move away from Foxhollow to develop activities in other locations, their engagement with former students brought up very real questions about the structure itself of EnlightenNext, both as a movement and an organization.

Although there had been initiatives at various times designed to break down the divisions that existed, these were unable to go very far. However towards the end, there were discussions to dissolve the divisions that still defined who was "in" and who was "out" of EnlightenNext by creating a larger and more inclusive identity. This was envisioned as being based on a historically shared spiritual and philosophical body of work and experience. Ideas such as forming some kind of Fellowship began to be explored.

In retrospect, neither the dismantling of false barriers and the ideas these were built on, nor the creation of a more collaborative responsibility and support for the growing autonomy of those within and 'without' EnlightenNext, could flourish within the structure we were all still in. Despite many attempts by individuals and groups of students the ossified attitudes and unresolved karma proved to be too entrenched. In retrospect, I do not believe this kind of integration could have occurred at the time without a profound reckoning by Andrew and all of us involved.

Section 4: The EnlightenNext legacy – what is it?

There appear to be layers to EnlightenNext's history with different people involved at different times with very different experiences. Thus varied and at times radically opposing conclusions abound. The discoveries and developments that occurred over years with all their volatility, when spoken about, have at times been strongly challenged, especially by those who left EnlightenNext years ago with the question, "Where is the evidence now?"

If I were to look only at Foxhollow and what happened in 2013 with the rapid dissolution and dispersion of the organization worldwide, I would agree. The collective consciousness we all worked so hard to actualize over the past three

decades appears to be shredded. Similarly if I were looking from the perspective of having spent years outcast with unaddressed moral injuries, I would ask the same question. But as the dust of EnlightenNext's implosion has settled another picture is emerging; one that belies the total evisceration of the shared spiritual depth, passion, and capacity for collective enquiry that flowed through all of us, in some form, at one time. This visibly and viscerally comes alive when those who have been immersed in this process, at whatever time in our history, come together. This lives in us, *as us*, sometimes despite us.

As those of us who share our history step across the chasm of the past fifteen to twenty years and openly speak about the part of that history that has been shrouded in denial, that which is Timeless is finding release. The Intimacy of Being and its progeny – the passionate Intelligence of collective enquiry – which those of us who have been students shared, is undeniably being recapitulated in different contexts. Precisely because the destruction wrought is an open public wound, and the cultural attitudes and structures of avoidance and power that kept this in place are being dismantled, this is opening up a possibility of going beyond the culture of reductionism that has kept us separate both within and outside of EnlightenNext.

End of Reductionism

Meeting with those who have had different history to myself, some of who hold opposing conclusions vis a vis EnlightenNext and our legacy, has been eye opening and deeply poignant. The gap in communication, perpetuated for years, has revealed a terrible lack of knowledge of each other's actual experience and the paths we have taken as a result, the people we have become.⁵⁸

Again and again, the immediacy of connection after so many years, the willingness to listen to each other often over our agitated hearts and minds, the dynamism of enquiry that is readily present between us to explore what our lives with Andrew and together have been about, and what this means about the lives we are living now, has had big impact on me in multiple ways. For one, it has confirmed the Unity that transcends personal history, even very troubled history, allowing real dialog to occur. It has also illuminated the degree of reductionism that has infected our relationships for so long and kept us separate. This includes the one-dimensional generalizations, the smart pejorative one-liners and the unsubstantiated assumptions ascribed to individuals and various groups (prior to

⁵⁸ It's been revelatory for both 'sides' to hear the experience of the other - just as the experience of leaving was traumatic, so was the experience of being 'abandoned' with the subsequent loss of deep friendships for those of us who stayed at EnlightenNext.

and post 2013) that we have all been guilty of, including Andrew. These are dissolving as the ‘walls’ go down and we actually see each other, afresh.

Reductionism of this kind is clearly not exclusive to EnlightenNext. It is what has, and does, separate human beings in ways so evident in the world all around us. The painful irony is that EnlightenNext was built on principles of fundamental Unity. In our case, because this reductionism became a ‘cultural’ phenomenon that started years ago, it goes in both directions of where we have polarized most. For example, just as the portrayal of those who felt compelled to leave Andrew as their teacher as “betrayers” or “losers” was and is offensive and reductive, so too is the assumption and portrayal of those of us who stayed at EnlightenNext, as simply “perpetrators of an abusive regime”.⁵⁹

Both positions are based on negative assumptions that rob us all of our humanity. More often than not, they also tend to come laden with powerful emotion that can deteriorate into aggressive assertion, denying the depth of intelligence and connectedness that once defined the ground of our relationships. No doubt some of these general assumptions are associated with experiences frozen in painful memories of the past, and without more information and human communication have become generalized and projected onto the present. Ironically many of us who stayed have those same traumatic memories, not just associated directly with Andrew, but memories that involve many who left –individuals who themselves were once leaders. There are also memories of group dynamics-- most of which occurred during intensive periods of pressure from Andrew –where the anonymity of the ‘crowd’ became a source of power that could turn on beleaguered ‘leaders’ in frightening group dynamics, hostility and derision compensating for fear. Our histories are deeply interwoven. We have all gone through many changes through the years, whether we stayed or left EnlightenNext. The delicate task of navigating these deep waters of often unresolved traumas with their pain and anger is a challenge for all of us in going forward.

Added to the complexity of our own history is the factor that cultural dynamics are fueled by history itself. We carry the imprint and effects of the dominant/ subordinate structures that have existed for millennia across cultures, including those of gender structures. From a big step back, we are, as Teillard De Chardin said, part of a process within a much larger Process, one that is “moving”.

⁵⁹ See Section on Changes

Legacy

I have been asked about EnlightenNext's legacy – is it only negative or is there something enduring that is positive? There are strong feelings on both sides of this question. My own experience is that *both* legacies exist and the future is open to be determined.

This is a controversial position which for some is simply not possible – the “truth” can only be one. In this “all or nothing” view, opposing (relative) realities cannot co-exist – ultimately one requires the negation of the other. As mentioned in the introduction to this piece, my own western orientation to this emotional ‘absolutism’ has made this question as challenging to grapple with for myself as for anyone else.⁶⁰ Classical Indian thinking has helped me to see the civilizational influences that shape our relationship to life and how we view its complexity – in this case paradox. In a contemporary commentary on the *Mahabharata* I personally found the following statement illuminating. “It is when the opposing truth has also been taken into account that a discourse will keep close to human realities. To state only one side of the truth may create a sense of clarity, but that clarity would have been achieved at the expense of truth.”⁶¹

The negative legacy of EnlightenNext, obscured and avoided for years, but laid open since Andrew's stepping down, is the corruption of spiritual power that occurred – in this case within Andrew, enabled through our, his students', participation. The result has been the destruction of many people's trust in Spirit, in themselves, and in some cases of their lives on a scale unimaginable in the autumn of 1986. There has also been a deepening mistrust of spiritual authorities in general, and the razing of a global network of spiritually inspired and engaged practitioners dedicated together to a utopian vision beyond the individual. Lastly, this has created a painful disaffection and cynicism in many with regard to the Utopian Impulse itself, an impulse that has inspired the human soul for millennia.

However, in the aftermath of EnlightenNext's demise, also evident, is the enduring legacy of deep spiritual conviction. This is evident to me not only in the work many are doing, but also in the meetings and re-connections that are occurring. It has at its source Love and Not-knowing and includes within it the space to embrace and understand our own darkness and transgressions as human beings. To me this is what is enabling us to meet beyond difference, beyond the vicissitudes of our history, without denying them.

⁶⁰ This has been the case despite our postmodern capacity to ‘hold multiple perspectives’ intellectually.

⁶¹ *The Mahabharata: An Inquiry in the Human Condition*, Charturvedi Badrinath

Andrew's enlightened transmission at the outset, as many concede, was pure ⁶² and generated a potential for human relationship and culture that is all of our legacy now. The depth of sincerity and totality of spirit with which so many responded to that initial purity and clarity, and the potential it offered, *is* what initiated a stream in consciousness, a lineage of conviction in Spirit, that although catastrophically disrupted, exists. And in contemporary culture this is rare. In a global world torn by differences, inequalities, and rapidly becoming consumed with narrow modernist values, this kind of conviction, whatever its source and wherever it lives, seems significant.

The Continuum: Evidence that we are part of a larger *continuum* is strong. What erupted in 1986 was not about the awakening of the *individual* but more significantly as described, the emergence of a field of awakened consciousness, Intelligence and Love *between* us. The twenty-seven years of EnlightenNext's tenure through all its twists and turns, to me, has fundamentally been about developing this field, making this phenomenon conscious. ⁶³ The thread of which tangibly connects us still.

From early on the magnet for our hearts was never only the possibility of transcendence of the world as an individual but the potential transformation of culture, as a conscious process founded in the One. This vision is not exclusive to EnlightenNext, but it is the core of what our work was about. Although many involved did not experience the changes that later took place, it is from the work and Love put in at every step that a 'higher we' emerged. And from this a dialogic process was developed, grounded in the knowledge of prior Unity, which can and does bring people together creatively beyond and including difference. ⁶⁴

⁶² The 'line' of transmission comes from Ramana Maharshi

⁶³ The indefensible destructive years of ego 'purification' were ostensibly in the context of this purpose.

⁶⁴ A brief summary of dialogic work: Other forms of collective intelligence and 'higher we' work exist, and have existed at other times and places. Within the history of EnlightenNext the refinement of this, along with its dialogic component, followed a steady line of development. In 2002 subsequent to the collective breakthroughs that had occurred within the student body, the London center experimented with groups of the public in focused enquiry groups. This led to the devising of simple but profound guidelines that allowed people outside of EnlightenNext circles to engage in deep creative dialogue beyond ego – the One through the Many.

Further developed over the years throughout the EnlightenNext community, especially on retreats, this dialogic capacity which can bring people together in deep dialog grounded in prior Unity, continues today to be further nuanced, and applied in new and diverse forums as Evolutionary Dialog. This is an ongoing exploration and process of development

Many no doubt disagree, but to me almost three decades on, shaped by hard lessons, our collective spiritual training⁶⁵ and experience has created an awareness and ‘methodology’ of ways forward in alignment with principles larger than our individual selves. Obviously more than a technique, this practice ultimately represents a shift in consciousness.

Our legacy is, I believe, one that includes the *entirety* of our past – the shadows, lessons and discoveries born of the Love, commitment and pain of the last three decades, as well as the talents and knowledge we possessed prior to meeting Andrew. The possibility of this integration is starting to be visible in different ways. I do not see EnlightenNext’s history in terms of “ends justifies means”, or in terms of denying almost three decades of intensive spiritual work. To me we are part of a continuum that is Life or consciousness itself.

Conclusion: The complexity of EnlightenNext’s history and Andrew specifically, similar to other spiritual organizations and teachers, clearly posits very real questions about the nature of enlightenment itself; about the relationship between enlightened consciousness and moral development; about our capacity as imperfect human beings to become vehicles of greater consciousness; about development and its relationship to spiritual principles; and finally, about the integrity of the guru paradigm itself, especially in the west. All this is further complexified in a context aspiring to bring about an awakened *collective*.

There is obviously a lot to this story, and a lot more will continue to emerge to be explored. The past two years, amongst those of us involved with EnlightenNext, irrespective of era, have witnessed the threads of our humanity, our history and spiritual depth merging in new ways that are moving beyond the guru paradigm and beyond a single organization. This has and is finding new expression in a variety of contexts. Some have moved on having embraced new lives, and in many cases are involved in innovative life-positive work. Whatever our experience has been and is, and however we interpret it, ideally in time for those of us involved in this story, this can and will contribute to our understanding of, and human capacity for, coming closer to the ideal of Unity within Diversity that fired, or still fires our souls.

Postscript: Many who left years ago, or even recently post 2013, may feel little or no connection to a shared past. By writing this I in no way intend to speak for everyone. To me what is important is the possibility that the truth of the entirety of our history as it unfolds, continues to release the past and further enable reconciliation, liberation and integration.

⁶⁵ Meaning the cumulative experience of each stage of our history, and all those involved.