

**Andrew Cohen and Evolutionary Transformation- by Sr Gail Worcelo,sgm  
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Several years ago I was invited to attend a retreat in Rishikesh, India given by Andrew Cohen, a 21<sup>st</sup> century spiritual teacher of Evolutionary Enlightenment dedicated to igniting a revolution in human consciousness.

Since that time I have been on several retreats with Andrew who reminds me of a modern day Desert Father. His style is similar to that of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Desert Tradition where seekers would come from far and near to ask questions and be in the presence of a teaching elder.

Andrew has a large following of students, men and women from around the world who either live together in one of his Centers, or who participate as student members from their own place of residence. One demand that this man of the modern desert tradition makes clear in his teacher-student relationships, is that he does not want followers but authentic partners in the great challenge of evolutionary transformation.

A student asks Andrew, “What is the goal of the spiritual life?” Andrew responds:

“The goal of the spiritual life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to become one with the forward movement of the life process, one with the evolutionary impulse emanating from the Source of creation itself.”

He goes on to say that the purpose of the spiritual life in our time is not the transcendence of this world, but its transformation, using our very lives as vehicles for this endeavor.

Andrew challenges his students to understand the crucial role we all play in the evolutionary process. He says that it is up to each of us to raise ourselves to a much higher level of engagement with life so that our very consciousness becomes enlightened with the knowledge of its own meaning and purpose.

I am reminded of the early Desert Mothers and Fathers of the Christian tradition who were also committed to radical discipline in the service of transformation of consciousness. They challenged seekers to labor to empty themselves of all that was not the “Christ Self”. This of course has been the central concern of the Christian path and has been the subject of the teaching of the great spiritual Masters from the beginning.

According to Andrew, what obstructs the “Christ Self” or what he calls the “Authentic Self” is the Ego. Andrew defines the ego as the deeply engrained, unconscious, compulsive need to remain separate and superior. He says it is expressed as the irrational refusal to say yes to life, love and God. It is the powerful force of inertia within ourselves that resists and defies that which is radically positive. The Ego is

de-evolutionary and has a downward, self centered pull. Andrew says, "You have to be willing to give up your unwholesome infatuation with the personal sphere."

A student asks Andrew to describe the "Authentic Self." Andrew replies that the Authentic Self is the indestructible goodness in each of us. It is the part of ourselves that cares for the whole and is interested in the future, is completely trustworthy, free, pure, wholesome, positive and transparent. It is vast, has no neurotic hang ups and is true to the larger context of life and evolution. It expresses itself as lightness of being and has an upward pull.

In response to another student Andrew said,  
"When your Authentic Self becomes stronger than Ego, you enter into a partnership with God. Your life becomes one with the Ground of Being and the creative principle in action. You take on the burden of evolution and realize it is your task to do so." He continued, "When your perspective gets big your neurotic self concern falls away."

Andrew calls the impulse to evolve a "Sacred Obligation" and says that it is nothing less than the "God Impulse" whose interest is in what has not yet emerged. This impulse to evolve arises out of the Ground of Being, the formless, absolute, timeless void, the essential foundation from which we are freed to participate in the evolutionary process.

The Desert Mothers and Fathers urged their followers to similarly embrace the sacred obligation of renouncing all desires for the sake of the one desire, Christ. The wisdom of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century desert tradition was already folding into the structure of the universe deep spiritual insights that would help all teachers and seekers build upon.

If we could speak with these women and men of the desert tradition today I think they would use words like "Christ Fusion", a word we have coined here at our monastery meaning to step into the evolutionary Christ and move into deeper levels of being within ourselves and together. Christ Fusion is surrender to the demand from the Christ Self to become more, to reach for higher and more complex forms of harmony and integration and to bring into manifestation that which has not yet occurred.

Andrew says that when we say Yes to living a spiritual life we experience that profound confrontation with ourselves- both with the de-evolutionary force that exists within and with our untapped potential for extra-ordinary leaps.

If we were to take a vow in this new evolutionary context that we find ourselves in , Andrew says it would be something like this:  
"I wholeheartedly commit myself to the evolutionary process and I will not cease to give myself to this process until all the matter in the universe has recognized itself as fully divinized."

**One of the major breakthroughs in the work of Andrew Cohen with his students is “the art of enlightened communication” or the what he calls the “Higher WE” which is something he has nurtured and supported throughout his years of teaching.**

**The “Higher We” is human interaction as we might imagine it to be in a perfect world where egoic barriers separating individuals are startlingly absent. It is a shared experience of the Authentic Self or Christ Self , a leap from I to we , from individuation to the living context in what Andrew Cohen calls intersubjective non duality.**

**In this context a higher WE consciousness emerges, one in which everyone experiences simultaneously their own individual AND collective transparency while remaining fully and completely THEMSELVES.**

**I have been on retreats with Andrew’s students and have experienced this first hand. It happens when everyone in the group comes together with the clear intention of speaking from the Authentic Self and with a shared interest in the evolution of consciousness. In my experience what arises in these gatherings is a depth of spiritual insight and illuminating wisdom far beyond what any of us can access alone.**

**What also occurs is an exposition of the ego. When it arises in these gatherings it stands out like an unwelcome intruder, a self centered presence inherently destructive to a unified field of awakened consciousness.**

**Andrew says that from our current state of extreme individuation or narcissism, the leap to the higher WE is the only logical next step for us to take. By coming together in authenticity and transparency, new and higher structures will naturally emerge. We will all begin to see our lives not as an isolated personal affair, but in the context of our extraordinary potential to participate in the evolutionary process together for the sake of the evolution of consciousness itself.**

**In reflecting on the women and men of the Desert Tradition I think of their unrelenting courage and earnestness in wanting to respond uncompromisingly, with their whole selves to the call of the Spirit. This is the example Andrew Cohen gives to his students. This desert father of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has given himself wholeheartedly with ruthless determination to the Divine and its evolutionary challenge.**

**The sayings of the Desert Mothers and Fathers has been for centuries an inspiration to Christians striving for unwavering obedience to the Gospel. The sayings were pithy maxims used as a teaching tool to pass on the wisdom of the desert dwellers. The essence of the spirituality of the desert was that it was caught not taught. This is clearly the situation with Andrew and his students.**

**One day I went to see Andrew Cohen and asked him for a word of direction. He responded to me in typical Desert fashion by saying, "I am glad you have found a friend that you will never see."**

**Andrew continued, "Many of us want to be enlightened but how many of us are ready to let our whole lives be guided by a friend that we will never be able to see?"**

**"For most of us it is unbearable even to conceive of, because it points to a kind of surrender that is unimaginable. A surrender in which the ego no longer gets to run the show. To let yourself be guided by the friend that you will never see is the dawning of humility."**

**I left my encounter with Andrew thinking, "This is what the Christ is, a friend that I will never see."**

**When we begin to discover the ungraspable Mystery that is our own deepest Christ-Self the door will open for that friend that we will never see to begin to speak through us and become us in the world. This is the heart of evolutionary transformation!**

**\*\*\* Quotes from Andrew are taken from retreat conferences, Quotes of the Week, and personal conversations.**