

The Great Activity

Love and Enlightenment

A zine on the intersection of Buddhism and Polyamory
by Heidi Enji Hoogstra

August, 2006

Issue #1



In Zen Buddhism, a bodhisattva is a being who vows to help all beings attain enlightenment. She lives in the world and offers her gifts to the world, however they may manifest. She puts others before herself, and she offers herself as an example to others. We all are bodhisattvas to others when we are at our most selfless and giving.

If people have heard of bodhisattvas, the one they most likely know about is the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteshvara, also known as Kanzeon, Kwan Yin, Kwanseum, Kannon. People are less likely to learn of Samantabhadra, or Fugen, the Bodhisattva of Great Activity. Taigen Daniel Leighton said in Bodhisattva Archetypes, "Samantabhadra also embodies the luminous web of the interconnectedness of all beings, and radiant visions that express it...."

I have been cultivating the practice of Buddhism for nearly 20 years. I've been a loving person all my life, but that practice kicked into high gear once I embraced polyamory around 8 years ago. I have found these two spiritual practices complement and inform each other tremendously. Above all, both paths bring liberation.

My experience in Zen has taught me that if you do this practice with sincerity, you will uncover your own true nature. Fear dissolves, attachments and aversions fall away because that fear dissolves, and what remains is one's own true nature, buddha nature. After fear dissolved, what emerged for me is love. Peel away the boxes and the labels, and my natural inclination is to love. How can I be stingy with that?

Polyamory provides a valid fertile ground for loving action, openness, and interconnectedness: vital forces for a strong spiritual focus. For many people, this path arises out of their natural spiritual impulses. Living in a society that views non-monogamy only through the spectrum of adultery, our natural spiritual and sexual impulses toward this connection and unity have been tainted with shame and guilt. It takes skills and guidance from those who've gone before to find one's own true path. I'm just another person on the path, but perhaps I can be your bodhisattva.



Understanding the Great Activity

Including writings from
adventuresinmultiplicity.blogspot.com

- o The Multiplicity of No-Self p. 4
- o Hyakujo's Fox p. 6
- o Liberation p. 8
- o Poem: On the Question of God to a Lover p. 11

Understanding Polyamory

- o Negotiating the Many Possibilities p. 13
 - o Key Ingredients p. 14
 - o That Jealousy Thing p. 15
 - o Falling in Love p. 17
 - o Tools for Relationships p. 18
- o In the Dictionary p. 19
- o Big Love p. 19

Resources

- o Glossary p. 19
- o Books p. 20
- o Websites p. 20



c Heidi Enji Hoogstra 2006.

Email me at heidihogstra@yahoo.com,

Write me at PO Box 14613, Portland, OR 97293

The Multiplicity of No-Self

A fundamental concept in Zen is the notion of no-self. Ultimately, the self has no form it can call its own, permanently and undividedly. Often people may get involved in Buddhism thinking the only way to understand this would be to have an enlightenment experience, I certainly did. I have not had that experience, but I think I

Fear nothing but the failure to experience your True-nature. This is Zen practice. —Zen Master Bassui

understand this. In order to introduce the subject we in our sangha will say, "Think of it as no-permanent-self." I am not the same self as the little girl seeking acceptance on the playground, nor the same self as the weight-conscious teenager, nor the same as the philosophizing college student.

On the other hand, I do contain that little girl, that teenager, that college student. Just to complicate things, those selves that make up me have been changed by time and memory and subsequent experiences. Sometimes their faces emerge and influence actions I may make today. All my experiences, all the conditions that have gone into the mix to make up me, they are pieces of me. They are my selves, distinct and changing. Is there something between the distinctive pieces? I have had glimpses of that emptiness, at least, I think that's what it is.

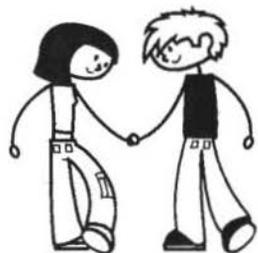
Looking at the no-self from another angle, we have certain selves that arise in certain conditions. Family gatherings invoke one self, nights out with friends another, spiritual gatherings yet another self. This multitude of selves may not exist continuously, separately, but arise and are born, or reborn, as the occasion demands. We Buddhists like to say this is possible thanks to that emptiness, possible only because there is no inherent self.

I have also learned and experienced that through the practice of awareness, my sense of self became less rigid. Any person who takes up a mindfulness practice will find there must be a period of time to work through karmic knots: those past conditions and experiences that influenced our current being raise their ugly and not-so-ugly heads and demand to be un-entangled. More and more, those conditions have less influence and we can meet whatever is in front of us. A multiplicity of options opens up.

Notions of right or wrong begin to have less to do with societal constraints and those karmic conditions, and more to do with an internal sense of truth.

These multiplicities of selves exist in relationship to something or someone. Just as my notion of my self has become more fluid, so has my notion of relationships. The usual boxes dissolve, and a multiplicity of options in relationships open up.

I awakened to a deeper possibility of love thanks to the lifting of fear through my Buddhist practice. My direction shifted from a constant internal focus to one of connection to others. When I met someone who felt as I did about non-monogamy, we gradually incorporated it into our lives. I found that as we became more comfortable with it, and shed that societal conditioning that says monogamy has all the integrity, my connections to others opened up. I experienced a deeper appreciation for all my relationships, and I began to see all relationships as sharing in that same deep loving connection that I share with my primary significant other. I find myself reluctant to use those labels. Husband. Best friend. Secondary partner. Housemate. Some aspects of my life I share with my husband. Some aspects I share with other close friends and not with my husband. I would be as devastated to lose my Buddhist teacher as I would to lose my husband. What necessarily places one over the other? Why is there a hierarchy in the first place, why not just differences?



I enjoy learning. Getting involved with new people means learning new feelings, new facts, new intimacies, new ways of being a friend. When I identify as polyamorous, what I mean is that I'm open to the possibilities. It's possible we could be casual friends, deeply intimate friends, could be all business, could have sex, could not have sex, could never see each other again, could flirt outrageously or flirt chastely, or we could fall in love.... Whatever happened, it wouldn't mean that I must turn away from all the other loves in my life. Whatever kind of connection I have now and might form in the future, honesty and respect would form the foundation, along with that love that connects us all. When we can share intimacy, we share in being one with everything. The way we share that intimacy is as varied as each rich moment shared with each individual. What an adventure!



Hyakujo's Fox

Early on in my relationship (if you can call it that) with a Bad Boy, I told a few of my friends I knew I was in danger of living 500 lives as a fox. Hyakujo's Fox is a famous koan that comes up often even in the just-sitting Soto Zen sect. Hyakujo was a Zen master who was asked by a student if the enlightened person is subject to karma. As a reward for his answer of "No," he was doomed to live 500 years as a fox. At least that's how I saw it, doomed. I knew there would be bad karma for getting involved with a pathological liar, yet I chose to be drawn in. I hoped I could change that pattern somehow, and for that I was willing to take on some negative karma. One of my friends did not see the fox story as so gloomy, because even if your actions do create negative karma, you do not have to live with those results forever. Eventually Hyakujo's fox was able to receive an abbot's funeral, and the karmic rebirths were over. The lesson to be learned was that enlightened ones are still subject to karma, but they are not fooled by karma.



I was surprised to see some of my wishes for that love echoed in a talk I found online by Zen teacher Zoketsu Norman Fischer. He says,

When we accept what is as what is and make our best effort with all our heart, willing to accept what will come out of it, and to work with that, then we are free- not from karma, but with karma, in karma, embraced by and embracing karma. No way of living is correct always- it may be correct and true, but just for now. Every moment we are at the crux- the place where life and death meet, the place where time and the timeless meet, the place where Buddha and yourself meet nose to nose and merge. Crux, cross, also, in our culture, evokes the idea of terrible suffering, bottomless suffering, that contains within it the seed of redemption.

This seed of redemption, this is what I pointed towards when I told this man that I hoped his heart would break. At that point, he just wouldn't allow it. He didn't allow people in. He didn't allow love in. I hope my love for him has an element of timelessness to it, so that if that does happen, he knows it is there, has been there for him. It is through the embrace of the messiness of this life in this moment that we can find liberation.

Zoketsu also says, "Maybe karma isn't a question of right and wrong or good and bad but Buddha doing what Buddha has to do to get the job done- to evolve toward enlightenment. So it might not be bad to have 500 lives as a fox if that is what you need." I think I did need that. I struggled for a long time with those 500 lives. After it was over, every day, like a drug habit, the urge to think about him was reborn. Even when I thought I'd figured out and released my more base motives, thoughts arose again. At one point I realized I was grateful for that a little bit. It reminded me that I can make poor choices and I must continue to be mindful, continue to be vigilant. It also reminds me that 500 lives as a fox might well be worth it if another person can be released from his animal realm, where the needs of others don't matter, only the basic drives to survive.

I couldn't, I wouldn't have gone as far as I did with this person if I had been single. I knew I couldn't count on this person for certain things you look for in a significant other:

companionship; dependability; even trust. Many told me, including my significant other, "You deserve better." I know, but I do have better. I didn't need him to be better. Through that willingness to dive into the messiness of life, to embrace Hyakujo's fox, I've found a greater capacity to accept others, to embrace empathy, to love those who are difficult to love, and to experience the deep gratitude for those in my life who are so easy to love. By loving someone who was difficult to love conditionally, I've learned how to love unconditionally, and I am absolutely amazed at the joy I find in my life because of that.

Liberation



After years of Buddhist practice I became less chained by conditions and conditioning, and opened up to the myriads of possibilities. I could more easily see the choice I have before I lock into conditioning because much of the conditioning had been swept away or transformed or at least revealed. Often we feel like we have no choice in our actions, but we do, always. This Buddhist practice gave me the skill and the understanding to see that. This is a lived expression of the Buddhist saying from Dogen:

To study the Way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things.

To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barriers between one's self and others.

When the many possibilities open up, I believe that is the same point where one is enlightened by all things. When the conditioning no longer rules you, that is where you have forgotten the self. When you begin to act where you choose from the many possibilities, that is where you can truly connect with others. You can make choices based on the best possibilities, rather than the

ego possibilities, the conditioned possibilities, the misguided self-preservation possibilities. As with anything that is a practice, this is not a linear process and I'm still always studying pieces of me.

OK, go from there to open loving. Societal expectations are karmic conditions. In polyamory, we dare to say that we can choose how our relationships look, we can choose the ways in which we love more than one, and we can do so with integrity. We recognize societal expectations of monogamy as conditions that we can choose or not choose. The wonderful thing is, if we choose not to limit our loving, we give ourselves many opportunities to learn and practice the letting go of self that brings us to that final part of that Buddhist formula, removing the barriers between ourselves and others. Because I had opened up to many possibilities, I think the possibility of polyamory came along for me, and now that I'm living it, I am learning and continuing to learn about more of those subtle barriers and how they can be dissolved. Many of those barriers have to do with debilitating judgments about others and our selves.



Finally, it is possible to dissolve such judgments so much so that we can truly have love for anyone. In polyamory some call this Love of All, in Buddhism, loving-kindness. Since I have opened my heart even more in this polyamorous path, I have become more appreciative of the Buddhist practices of loving-kindness. I have also felt more of an aspiration to be a bodhisattva, felt myself to be a

bodhisattva. A bodhisattva continually turns over her practice to the weal of the world, not for the sake of self but for the sake of enlightenment of all. One of my teachers once quipped, "A bodhisattva is an enlightened codependent." I feel this especially in the practice of love. An unenlightened codependent puts others before herself as a way to establish control or because she doesn't feel she deserves anything. An enlightened codependent has no concern for self but is concerned instead for Love itself, concerned for the weal of all.

At first glance, many people think non-monogamy is not compatible with Buddhism. The second noble truth links our suffering in this life to desire, craving. While desires of the body

are included in that, this noble truth really points to the attachments and aversions of an ego that seeks to keep certain formations solid. When this being, made up of heaps of body, emotions, perceptions, thoughts, and consciousness, wants to preserve those heaps, that is the desire referred to.

It is easy to comprehend the attachments we form to pleasures of the body. It's also easy to ban them, as these often were for monks and nuns. It's not so easy to understand that when Buddhist sects say this is the only way to liberation, these sects have also succumbed to the traps of attachment and aversion. This human body is naturally part of me, intimately connected to and influencing my thoughts and habits. Like any drug, the neurochemistry of love can produce addictive behavior. The question is, will I be ruled by that, or can I let go when appropriate? I am not only this biochemical machine. The practice of living this life does not necessarily spurn this body's natural function, nor does it try to hang on to it. The ideal doesn't necessarily look like celibacy, or monogamy, or polyamory. The ideal meets each moment with letting go, choosing, letting go, choosing, letting go.

The Buddhist that help us to follow the Eightfold Path. In expressed more cases with room for people might say that violates the precept, sexuality." Most often ways in which society that is not necessarily the sexuality. In my tradition, one has a relationship to the precepts, and my expression of them will not look the same as my friend's, or my teacher's. Even in this, it is possible to fall into a trap that says that enlightened expressions of the precepts will look the same because there is some absolute reality to enlightenment. In my case I strongly believe that I would misuse sexuality if I demanded sexual exclusivity of my lover. I do not own him or her. In fact, to me this would violate another precept, "Do not take the gift not given (do not steal)."



precepts are guidelines 4th Noble Truth, the some cases they are absolutely, in other relativity. Some non-monogamy "Do not misuse it is interpreted in the accepts sexuality, but natural response to

In our Dharma School, we sing a song about the Buddha's life, that time when he first visited the outside world and saw

sickness, old age, death, and a holy man. A line in the refrain goes, "And he found liberation, which neither comes nor goes." Buddhism is about finding that liberation, but Buddhism would not say the path to that liberation must look a certain way. Liberation is possible in any kind of life, some more difficult than others, but still possible. Because of societal biases towards monogamy and celibacy as a spiritual ideal, from the outside it looks like polyamory could be one of those more difficult paths. Now that I'm some years into it, I find rather that it fosters spiritual connections. Practice in intimacy breeds more meaningful intimacy. When approached with mindfulness, honesty, and integrity, "many loves" becomes love of many, no conditions attached.



On the Question of God to a Lover

if there is a glue that binds
this universe together
perhaps that would be
Love.

the urge to merge,
to become not-two
defying entropy and
death.

why worry if there is a god
when the important question is
how do i live this life?

most of the time
i am content
to coast in the ambiguity
of not knowing

you challenged me
to express something
i think cannot be named,
even is dangerous to name.
as soon as it is expressed
it is not true.

as soon as it is expressed
misunderstandings arise.

i confess
i am not proud
or noble or wise.
rather than lose you
so soon
i will attempt
to express something
i do not yet know.

i know we are made
of the stuff of stars,
stardust that changes and
dies into a new form

made of emptiness
continually moving
closer, closer
uniting in gravitous love
even while the universe
expands.

all entangled in this
the mystery, life.
consciousness and love.
how did atoms spark to
create free will?

i say it doesn't matter
as did the Buddha.
there are wounds to heal
hearts to mend.
too many suffering beings
that need good medicine,
peaceful medicine

the urge to merge with you
is strong.
compelling.
i would submit wholeheartedly.
i could take the chance
of a broken heart.

can i remember
the love
that already exists?
the glue that binds?

passion quickly becomes
attachment
and clarity disappears.
i confess i search
for certainty
where none can be found.
with elation i soar
and with fear i plummet.



tenderhearted, fragile,
i remember my someone
who cannot help but
pick up the pieces
should my heart break

and perhaps i do
remember the love
that permeates all.
a love that allows me to love him
and to love you too,
as we always have,
whether in love or not.



Negotiating the Many Possibilities

I have no illusions that I am predicating anything new here. I write from my own experience, which is just one possibility of the many. There are many writings in Buddhism, but it is still possible to misunderstand it if one only reads. A vital piece of Buddhism is the learning that happens through a teacher, one who has gone before. Likewise in polyamory, many people have written eloquently about it, but it is still possible that those outside looking in will draw mistaken conclusions or won't find the answers that speak to them. The vital learning in both paths comes through experience of it and through teachers and community. What is one person's medicine could be another's poison. Some people need to hear that love is limitless; others need to hear that in a world of finite time and resources, you can't love everyone equally. Sometimes the person that existed yesterday needed to hear one thing, but tomorrow she needs to hear the other. When we try to hang on to methods and aphorisms as the ultimate answers, they stagnate and can become poisonous myths. The bountiful joy I have found depends on the understanding that what I have found to be true and useful today may not be so tomorrow, so in this present moment, I appreciate what I have.

People tell me I give good advice. I thought I'd try to share some of that here, but I do that with some trepidation. I'm afraid I may solidify some understanding that is better applied to individual circumstances. I'm sure I've given conflicting advice, because circumstances will be different for everyone. If I can glean some universal wisdom from those individual responses, I find I cannot separate the practical from the spiritual. When it comes to relationships, the cultivation of love is best fortified with those spiritual foundations of kindness, respect, compassion, tolerance, and giving.



Key Ingredients

1. Faith Newcomers to Buddhism often grapple with the question of faith. There is a faith in Buddhism, but it is not a blind faith. For me, it felt like I had found my home. The methods and wisdom made sense to me, and that trust was borne out by experience. It is the same with polyamory. For this to work at all there must be a trust and commitment from all involved that it *can* work. When my significant other developed a new significant relationship, my trust in him *and* in polyamory provided a framework for best action on my part. A pre-existing partner is in a strong position either to undermine a new relationship, or to support it. Cultivate trust.

2. Mindfulness. Pay attention and keep paying attention. We have deeply ingrained monogamous programming from the society we live in. Any good relationship takes work, but that work is a labor of love. We are full of conditioning, whether societal morals or archetypal fulfillments or unconscious voices about self-worth and self-esteem. It is a mistake to take anything for granted in any relationship. Since all relationships are different, all can flourish from mindful and caring attention. At the bottom of most scary emotions is fear. Be willing to examine that fear without judgment. What does that fearful self need to feel comforted? Cultivate understanding.

3. Willingness. Be willing to make mistakes, and allow for mistakes in others. There are many ways in which people concretize their identities. We may depend on mores and societal expectations to negotiate our place in the world. When we choose a path that is different from the majority of society, we have no ground to stand on. Actually it is a fallacy to think we have that ground in the first place. Each new step is creating a new me, and you may not know if it will hurt yourself and others. Sometimes you will not know how far is too far until that happens. Chalk it up and move on, it was a mistake. Or I should say, there are no mistakes. Cultivate tolerance.

4. Find community. You don't have to do this alone, and it is helpful to fortify that faith in polyamory by finding others who have made it work. Even if somebody doesn't give you the right answers, your asking the questions and finding a mirror in others helps you to find your own path. Books are not enough;

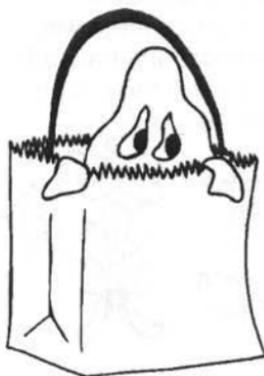
engagement allows the ideal to become actual. Loving friends and partners can help you with your blind spots. Loving communities can model neutral advice. Cultivate loving relationships.

That Jealousy Thing

Those who criticize polyamory most often view jealousy as hardwired and insurmountable, thus open relationships are too much work. If one has a view of the self as unchanging and inevitable, there's no way I could change that view. It's pretty much the same as saying violence is hardwired into human beings, so war is inevitable. Such views completely ignore the ways in which we create habits of thought that fortify jealousy, that fortify hatred. It doesn't take long when using the tools of awareness, curiosity, and acceptance to find out that most feelings of jealousy and animosity are the results of attitudes and conditioning, not at all inevitable, nor must we be ruled by them. Jealousy is a complex issue, and really a catch-all word for several other conditions. Here are a few. Every person is different, I don't mean to imply this covers the issue.

- o Fear

In my experience, if there's ever a feeling of threat, fear is the underlying emotion, even if the actual response is anger, jealousy, bitterness, resentment, etc. There are ways to get to the bottom of fear, such as imagining the whole scenario that scares you. Find the specific notion that brings up the emotion. How can that piece be addressed? A blanket fear when getting started in polyamory is that you will lose your lover to another. How can that fear be assuaged, without harnessing your lover into a confining relationship? Many people who trust in the process find that if the fear is given comfort, the need for the rule or condition dissipates. The big fear is that of the unknown, and there's no way around that but to take the plunge. Don't be afraid to be afraid. When you look at the fear with calm attention, you can deal with it.



- Insecurity

Sometimes people are afraid they can't compete, or that they mustn't be loved enough, or they have an extraordinary need to feel secure. If someone isn't secure in who they are, they may not feel good enough to hold onto another. It doesn't matter if they're in an open relationship or not, there are no guarantees in monogamy either. Such a person needs to find that security, that self-esteem, and that self-love. I would say that could only be helped by the love of many. Also keep in mind that we tend to feel more strongly the impact others have on us, but don't understand or feel how strongly we impact others. Insecurity can really warp perceptions, neutral mindfulness can counteract that. One way of finding that self-love is to find ways to be kind to others. An awareness of that impact not only reminds us how much we mean to others, it also bolsters self-esteem.

- Ownership

Embedded in monogamy is an idea of ownership. This is my husband. He may only have sex with me. He may only have deeply intimate emotions with me. I am entitled to his time, attention, his money, and his romantic love. If I feel this way, then any time, attention, love, or money that is not spent with me I would consider stolen. I have heard monogamists speak this way, and it is a myth. Ultimately, no one can dictate the emotions or even the actions of another.

If instead one looks on a relationship as a gift, all that is received in love, attention, time, even money is greeted with gratitude. If commitment arises out of gratitude, one naturally wants to give back. A committed relationship will form out of needs and compatibility, not some expectation of a happily-ever-after template. Keeping in mind that people change over time, that sense of ownership could make some relationships go on much longer than would be healthy. I have found that with no expectations that each day renews my love and keeps it fresh. Each day I commit again.



- Primal

Here's where one could say, "That's just the way I am." Certainly individuals will have different degrees to which they are prone to jealousy that is hard-wired. I have yet to witness

jealousy that could not be explained by fear, insecurity, or sense of entitlement. Even if it exists, why can't we train ourselves not to indulge in it? We certainly train ourselves how to respond to a 'fight or flight' survival mechanism. Most of the time I think this is an excuse not to change damaging emotional habits. I'm not saying that everyone should become polyamorous, but jealousy in any relationship can do heavy damage. If this is a bodily reaction, use it. Turn it into passion, not anger.

Falling in Love

Rather than use the loaded word 'infatuation' or the romantic phrase 'falling in love,' polyamorists will speak of New Relationship Energy, or NRE. I still prefer to fall in love. Some would say 'falling in lust' but I don't think that covers it, because I've found sometimes sex isn't involved at all, or usually there's something beyond just sex.

As I've told a new friend, I fall in love easily. But after falling in love hard several times, I've learned to negotiate the roller coaster so it's a smoother ride. I've learned to have a tender heart without it being so painful.

It helps to know about the biochemistry of falling in love. According to Helen Fisher in "Why We Love", the chemistry of love is dopamine, and could include a chemical derived from dopamine, norepinephrine. Thus the sweet ecstasy, tremendous energy, lack of appetite, sleepless nights. Also, when there are high levels of these two, the levels of serotonin drop. Thus the depressive lows, especially when the love is not reciprocated. Selfish feelings are all a part of falling in love. It could be helpful to keep that in mind when sharing a lover....don't just blame the non-monogamous aspect.

Dr. Fisher shared some useful strategies for getting over a love. Among them were doing new things, keeping busy, getting exercise. These help raise natural dopamine levels. Doing new and exciting things together can help sustain an existing love, again to raise the dopamine levels. Considering Dr. Fisher recommended these strategies that work with our bodies' nature, I thought she rather cavalierly dismissed polyamory as idealistic

and impractical, tossing off jealousy as a reason it just couldn't work.

It is possible to steer that new love energy to your pre-existing love. Actually, it happens kind of naturally. When you brim over with all those love chemicals, the world and all in it sparkles, and you sparkle. Those sparks feed life into a comfortable mature relationship. While I haven't really looked for it, I've found allowing new loves into my life really feeds the romance in all my loves. It keeps courtship alive. It keeps renewing that love.

Tools for Relationships

1. Own your own emotions. If you have expectations of another for certain actions, that other is not responsible for how you deal with the emotions, you are. If you say someone makes you angry, that's not true. You made you angry in response to someone's actions. Perhaps those actions weren't the best, but you create your emotion in response.
2. Cultivate love and don't indulge in anger and irritations. So much conflict comes out of a habit of anger. It's one thing to communicate your needs, but another to expect that your needs always be met and to be irritated when they're not. I'm not saying stuff so-called negative emotions, but be aware of them, and learn how they could be habitual.
3. Learn good problem solving. A lot of conflict in any relationship can be avoided through peaceful conflict management. Study and understand how conflict happens. Conflict indicates needs are not being met, and that is a problem to be solved. Find those problem-solving tools and use them.
4. Experiment with emotional aikido. Rather than tackle a wall of resistance, try indulging with care and kindness. Naturally if you push against a wall, you get an equal and opposite force pushing back. Allow some extra room and padding for mistakes. Encourage the airing of grievances; don't let them grow too big. Unless someone is completely selfish, they will give the same back.
5. Think of each relationship as a being in itself, and each being in a family needs to be cared for. I care about the relationship I have with my sweetie's sweetie because I care about my sweetie. It needs to proceed at its own pace, but it can't be ignored or allowed to be undernourished.

Polyamory is now in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary: noun: the state or practice of having more than one open romantic relationship at a time. I wonder if that bothers the conservatives. It shouldn't, they helped put it there. For nearly a year I kept track of the times I received a google news alert for 'polyamory'. Of the 126 news items that came to my attention, 49 of them were negative mentions in conservative columns. Most of those were arguments over gay marriage, making polyamory the 'slippery slope'. 34 were positive mentions. In July 2006, 8 mentions due to the dictionary news. In March 2006 there was quite a flurry, thanks to the first showings of the HBO show, "Big Love."

Big Love

Something the HBO show on polygamy is only beginning to address is how big a love can be through sharing. We all have our shadow sides, our flaws, and our hang-ups. An open relationship is a wonderful opportunity to find those dark sides of ourselves. They lose their grip on us when revealed to the light of day. Fears, aversions, and addictions limit our potential. A sincere practice of loving action opens that potential up wide. A naturally loving being can expand to unknown magnitudes. In some traditions, the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is depicted naked, making love to his naked consort, Samantabhadri, the primordial mother of the Buddhas. This is the Great Activity. Hatred breeds more hatred, but love also breeds more love. Make love not war, everybody!

Glossary

- **Bodhisattva:** An enlightened being who, out of compassion, forgoes nirvana in order to save others.
- **buddha nature:** that potential in everyone to become fully awake, to be a buddha
- **dharmā:** teachings of Buddhism
- **sangha:** Buddhist community, in a wider sense, all that is community, whether family, friends, or congregation



