

What is Spiritual Polyfidelity?

by Allan Jensen with Ryam Nearing

ONE DEFINITION OF ENLIGHTENMENT IS when a person knows that "negative thoughts create negative results and that positive thoughts create positive results," (Sondra Ray). Based on this, a polyfidelitous group involved in spiritual polyfidelity must be aware of their power in co-creating their lives together. As humans with varying limitations and wounds, it is not always so easy to simply think positively. In addition, all people in the group must know that they are each individually responsible for their feelings and that anytime they feel upset or "plugged in," if you will, it's a chance to get at deeper causes of the negative feeling instead of simply blaming a partner or current situation. Many times these feelings will be connected to negative childhood experiences or beliefs that are buried in the subconscious.

But even this level of knowing and understanding may not be really considered spiritual by the person or group. They all may process on an intellectual level and clear the air, but is each individual feeling better at that deeper level, and maybe even blissful now and again? Is each individual feeling like they're becoming closer to each other in love, and more of all they can be? Do they experience a true release of energy from deep in their core so that these same melodramas needn't be replayed again and again, broken tapes from the past?

A group marriage can be the hottest fire and the fastest acceleration of personal and spiritual growth (these are really hard to separate for me!). I've always liked the phrase "Burn your karma in the flames of spiritual polyfidelity." If a group family is the hottest fire and is a very fast acceleration of personal growth, how do we handle the "G" force of this acceleration? I think some structural basics are laid out in the *Polyfidelity Primer*; things like clarifying personal values, consciously choosing relationships rather than "falling" into them, openly and efficiently handling prosaics like finances and decision making, etc. But

as individuals trying to come together for more synergy and stimulation, a frequently limiting factor is our ability to move beyond the confines of the detrimental beliefs we took on from our childhood families and culture.

To do this requires a giant leap of faith into a sparsely populated frontier with few trail markers. This is where personal confidence is a must and where the feeling of a connection with some transcendent energy is a lifeline. While it is possible for group families to live together in narrow, always smiling (or frowning) roles like Ozzie and a couple Harriets (or vice versa), by breaking the standard pattern of twosies, a more holistic breakdown also occurs, freeing up all kinds of energy. This energy needs to be first experienced and integrated enough to flow with it like a surfer does an ocean wave. It feels similar to times of high creativity for the artist, times of questioning and insight for the seeker, times of physical peak or demand for the athlete, and times of deep feeling for the empath.

Ask any group marriage member, and a constant comment is about the "intensity" of the experience. Those who live the lifestyle longterm learn to relish the experience and find that anything less is deadly dull, although for some it is just too much and they choose other lifestyles more suiting their needs. The energy is not superficial excitement or entertainment, it comes from deep within and the process seems to never end, though there are breaks and lulls in the action. (Phew!)

To become individually strong enough to handle the power of this type of relationship, I believe deeper levels of childhood trauma need to be healed, allowing us to reach higher levels of self-awareness, bliss and emotional/physical well-being. My own experience is that talking out an upset doesn't necessarily get at my own or partners' subconscious childhood stuff. But using the upset with breathing exercises commonly called "rebirthing" has been a great way to get at and let go of subconscious, undifferentiated pain that was stored way back in the childhood memory bank. I've reconnected to past pains of my own that I never

—Continued on page 3

Aloha!

This is PEP's 7th anniversary issue of PEPTALK. We've completed another circle of seasons and are back to the beginning once more. It's the start of 1991: a time for releasing the old to allow for refreshing newness in its place.

This applies to us each personally and also to the next issue of the newsletter which we hope will surprize you positively with its changes and comfort you with its constancy. At times, loving more than one partner is an overwhelming challenge, but through our mutual support and friendship, we create, our own micro-culture. One that blesses our ability to love more and our braveness to persevere in this pioneering style.

Today is an especially good time to reflect on your dreams and desires and to describe them to yourself as clearly as you can. Fill in each and every detail. Then take action: do something now that feels like a good way to live your dream. Fill 1991 with your passion and love for life.

Ryam

Local Events

OREGON: Any PEP members who plan to visit the Eugene area should contact Shirley Reeves at (503) 683-6197 or send a note to 1430 Willamette, #514, Eugene, Oregon 97401. She would be happy to introduce you to the local folks who are now holding regular monthly events. They have potlucks and other activities for people who share an interest in multiple committed partnering, and they love to meet new friends. **UTAH:** Polyfidelity support group

May your Solstice be merry and magic...Your New Year ecstatic!

Deadline for next issue is February 15, 1991
Write. We'd love to hear from you! See page 9

PEP is an educational organization. We publish learning materials and information about polyfidelity. Our materials describe direct experience and the ideas and theories which have developed from it. (See back page for publications.) Networking is another one of our functions. *Peptalk* is our official newsletter and is published quarterly. Return postage must accompany all submissions if they are to be returned, and no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. All rights in submissions, letters, and questions sent to PEP or *Peptalk* will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and copyright purposes and are subject to our unrestricted right to edit and comment editorially unless prior agreements are made in writing. Corporation headquarters located in Eugene, Oregon. © Copyright 1990
Editor & Brains—Ryam Nearing Layout & Goof off—Barry Northrop

forming in the Salt Lake City area. Anyone interested in participating should call Walt Haas at (801) 534-1262 or write him at 717 Ninth Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah 84103 **ANYWHERE ELSE:** If you want to put out the word to PEP members about your already existing or newly formed group, simply send the specifics to PEP before the next deadline (February 15, 1991) and we'll include you in our notices! ❖

Quantum Leaps

People who choose polyfidelity find it is more than a mere incremental increase in numbers when compared to this culture's traditional dyadic relationship. To make the changes necessary to success—fully and happily live in a group marriage, basic beliefs and ingrained attitudes must radically shift. It is not just the simple case of dealing with the prosaics: scheduling your time, choosing a big enough car, or figuring out what last name to give the baby. The choice to embrace the lifestyle is a giant leap away from the tried and true, the "off the shelf" relationship package, and the support and approval of friends, family, and society.

The predominant current theory of major evolutionary change describes it as taking place in leaps rather than in tiny baby steps. In a similar manner, although it is more comforting to our security needs to imagine a group marriage as simply one or two more people to live with, there is, of course, much more to the story. Major values about cooperation and collaboration, individuality within a group, the purpose of family and how it is established (choice versus blood), the meaning of life and love, and much more must transform to allow for internal psycho-spiritual harmony in a person living the lifestyle.

Without this leap, a person will be confused, unhappy, and as severely limited as someone trying to use Newtonian physics in an quantum universe will be. A woman who needs to have the comfort and security of one and only one intimate partner will always be uneasy in the universe of loving more; a heterosexual male who sees all other males as competitors for his lover will never experience the level of brotherhood and feelings of compersion (opposite of jealousy) that are available to those who embrace polyfidelity. It's simply a whole different world, and the old rules, beliefs, and fears are out of place. They must be released and left behind in the dust of unconscious coupling; non-negotiable interpersonal conflicts, and constricting life scripts. ❖

Spiritual Polyfidelity *continued...*

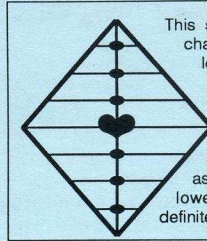
acknowledged before, but which negatively influenced the way I treated my friends and loved ones. I tended to repeat the insensitive actions that had been done to me, trying to control others to keep my own old pain securely held down. "It's your fault! Don't cry! Don't be a baby!" Allowing myself to re-feel these emotions has made it easier to be empathetic and supportive to the feelings of my family and friends.

In my own case, I've also used fasting and diet modification to get back in touch with the sensitive part of myself that was hidden behind a macho defense. I've found that my family (chosen, not blood) is a great place to let go of a lot of baggage I was carrying and to be loved and accepted. Supporting each other in our growth makes it a true healing place where unresolved childhood issues can be grieved and released. This is part of the process that allows me to open up more fully to my spirituality. When I feel loved just as I am, I can experience higher highs with the energy freed up from not having to hide or hold down old unexpressed feelings. Living with partners who don't blame me for their experiences or feelings, I feel free and loving and can support them through their pain.

One idea that the rebirthing community has in terms of spiritual relationships is that all partners are best aligned on some core beliefs. The most significant of these is the basic life urge (consistently prioritizing personal choices that are life-enhancing rather than not: like breathing instead of smoking; exercising rather than watching TV all day, honestly feeling instead of glossing over emotions). This way, partners can work towards higher levels together rather than getting bogged down in the endless patterns of who did what and whose fault it was. All this is just another way to express the idea that by joining energy, partners can make real progress with their life issues, not just repeat the same old, sad scripts they saw their parents and siblings live out together.

Another useful spiritual aspect in our family life is a Tantric vision with its wholistic perspective and deep acceptance (a must for living intimately with others). Tantra's non-dogmatic openness works especially well with our outlaw attitudes and also encourages ecstatic experience, the integration of complementary "opposites," and finally, of course, sexual healing which is essential in this repressive and fearful culture.

Now, of course, this is not to say that my family life is somehow always high or holy. It takes a lot of mutual



This simple drawing represents the chakras of the human body. Lower levels with needed healing act as an anchor to the higher levels: The weight of this deep pain keeps us from experiencing the higher levels of happiness and bliss. Notice the heart chakra as the balancing bridge between lower and higher levels. (This is definitely spiritual erotica.)

commitment and reminding to stay on the track of learning to really love each other in all our daily actions. But by living together, we have lots of time to practice. And practice makes perfect, or at least closer to it! When one of us gets caught up in his/her personal issues and loses the larger perspective, it rarely takes long to get back in the swing. Breathing through the emotion and really feeling it in the now seems to make the whole process much quicker and cleaner. We each start from our own spot and move forward at our own pace, working on our own specific issues. But being together certainly gives a power boost. Surrounding yourself with spiritual and loving partners makes each step both a personal and group triumph and each misstep easier to change. My bottomline perspective is that the real reason people get together in polyfidelitous relationships is for personal and spiritual growth, whether they know it or not. ♦

The New Faithful **A Polyfidelity Primer**

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Can This Marriage Be Saved?

PEP RECEIVES MANY CALLS AND LETTERS from people who are part of a couple, but who are interested or are in the process of expanding their relationship to include one or more additional people. Many of these contacts are from individuals who are partnered with someone who finds the idea of expansion "out of the question." Here are some examples of their stories and a perspective on their choices (names, details, etc. changed to prevent identification).

Dana, Mike, and Mister X

When single, Dana always dated several men at a time, enjoying the diversity of companionship styles and activities they offered. But when she met Mike, he became her primary focus. They enjoyed each other's company so much that they found themselves spending most weekends together, as well as a night or two during the week when their schedules weren't too heavy. Dana continued to date other men on a fairly casual basis in the limited time she had available for socializing. At some point it became reasonable to both her and Mike that living together would save them lots of between apartment travel time, and that they could afford more space and a nicer place by combining their rent payments. In moving in together, it all seemed simple and straightforward. They cared for each other deeply, got along quite well, and it certainly was more convenient. It seemed like a positive and exciting step for two independent adults.

As they spent more time together, doing routine versus special-occasion activities, and as they lived in what looked like a standard couple relationship (dangerously close to marriage-like), they discovered some big differences in what they each wanted, expected, and could accept in each other. Mike had assumed that moving in together meant the end of Dana's other dates and especially the end of her outside sexual relationships. When a particularly close old friend from out of town came to visit her, Mike was thrown into a stormy emotional sea of fear about losing her. He felt jealous of her obvious excitement over seeing her sporadic but long-term lover and couldn't understand how she could relate intimately with someone other than him. His anguish convinced him that he loved Dana and must marry her.

Dana suddenly found her so-free and so-adult partnership with Mike turning into an old fashioned

melodramatic script. She knew she loved Mike and enjoyed living with him, but hadn't really considered giving up her other lovers or her option to meet and have new lovers in the future. While she wasn't out looking for a constant male hit, to appease a sexual addiction, she was a very social person, and from time to time met someone who seemed especially attractive and who she wanted the opportunity to get to know better, including sex if it felt right to her. Faced with the lifestyle she wants for herself and with Mike's sudden new need for exclusiveness, what can she do?

Janice, Buddy, and Sarah

Janice and Buddy had been married for years when Buddy read a science fiction novel and then started talking about expanded relationships. He made it clear that he didn't want to stop loving or being married to Janice, but he was interested in getting closer to other people too. Janice at first was quite frightened by his ideas. She felt somehow abandoned or belittled, as if she wasn't enough for him. She had always felt they had a good marriage, and the idea of Buddy getting intimate and sexual with another woman went against her beliefs about what a good marriage was like.

Janice decided to read some of the book that had intrigued Buddy, and found herself interested despite her fears. She enjoyed close friendships, and the story in the book described the people involved as friends who shared a lot, as a kind of family who went on adventures together, and enjoyed spending time in various configurations. She replaced her scary images of nights alone at home while Buddy was out with some woman she had never met. Instead she imagined talking and having coffee with people who were friends with both her and Buddy, going dancing (something Buddy hated) with an attentivemale friend, and exploring closer relationships and a new lifestyle with Buddy, as a team supporting each other's growth. She began to feel excited and intrigued.

After plenty of discussion and reassurance, Buddy and Janice were able to come to a few simple agreements about opening their marriage. These covered safe sex and a mutual veto position on each other's lovers. Neither of them would become emotionally or sexually intimate with a partner not approved by each other. They felt this allowed for a better mutual match and would create less divisiveness between them. The only other agreement they made had to do with time. They decided that two nights per week would be the maximum either of them would spend with outside dates. This would still give them plenty of time

together, which they knew was really important for their own relationship's health.

All went well for several years as each Janice and Buddy made various close friends and lovers outside their marriage. Overall they each seemed to choose people who could be mutual friends. Despite ups and downs, and especially occasional scheduling conflicts, they clearly prioritized their marriage. During periods of stress (changing jobs, building a new house, etc.) this helped a lot.

When Buddy met Sarah, it seemed like just another new friend/lover relationship was beginning. But unlike all his other partners, Sarah wanted to get to know Buddy more completely. As their relationship progressed, she wanted more than dates and good times once a week or so. She wanted more time, more sharing, more depth. She was really in love with him. Buddy felt drawn to her in an increasingly strong way too. He found himself calling her every day, and depending on her insights in his emotional life, like with some problems he was having with Janice.

Sarah and Janice had met early on, and had spent time together occasionally when all three of them went out to a movie together, or when Janice also invited her lover and the four of them ordered a pizza and watched videos at home on a Saturday night. It all felt pretty comfortable in a light and social way, and even when Sarah phoned Buddy at home and got Janice, there seemed to be no problems. After all, Buddy and Sarah had an open marriage.

The day that Buddy came home and said he needed to talk, Janice felt frightened again. This time he said that he was really in love with Sarah and wanted her as part of his life. He used the word group marriage and talked about all of them living together. Janice panicked. She felt abandoned and insignificant once again. It felt like Buddy always wanted something more. How could they all live together? How could he love Sarah as much as he loved her? How could he expect her to share him and her home and her whole life with Sarah just because he and Sarah were in love?

What Can They Do?

Both these stories include some of the endlessly

repeated patterns that people run out in their learning process about relationships. For Mike, he had to be in a relationship and get hit with Dana's actions before he discovered that he was monogamous and really was ready for a committed partnership at this point in his life. Dana just as suddenly discovered that just because no expectations were discussed didn't mean that they didn't exist. Her desire to just keep going with her open style of relating after moving in together assumed Mike would simply concur. As individuals they hadn't resolved themselves in a conscious way on just what type of relationship they wanted, and, as a couple, they hadn't verbally expressed their choices in a direct manner. With all this undone, the universe provided them with a perfect opportunity to learn about themselves and to test their relationship together.

Most people choose to spend this time in their life feeling wronged, blaming their bitch of a partner, and either suffering in the relationship while tormenting their lover or hitting the street to go on to contestant number two.

Mike needs to consider his assumptions and to decide if these are simply hold overs from his Catholic school days, his parent's marriage, or his need for social approval from his buddies (What would they say if they knew Dana was sleeping with another guy and he was just letting it happen!?). He also must assess his feelings to discover if his fears about Dana loving someone else are leftovers from unmet childhood needs or if he really is just a true-blue, monogamous guy looking for his soulmate. All this requires an incredible level of maturity and wisdom or a great deal of motivation and desire (or both). Most people choose to spend

this time in their life feeling wronged, blaming their bitch of a partner, and either suffering in the relationship while tormenting their lover or hitting the street to go on to contestant number two. This allows for their patterns to be endlessly repeated, with minor variations. Next time Mike can find a monogamous miss and marry her. After the typical two year interval, he can meet some attractive woman at his office Christmas party and after too many drinks engage in his first affair. Then it's his turn to be the bad guy.

Dana needs just as much personal strength to determine her own situation. She sleepwalked her way into a loving but unclear connection with Mike and can do so again in the future. She could also do a gut level react and decide to never live with any man again because they just want to control her. Then she can always keep her distance and enjoy sport sex ►

only with guys who are just as afraid of intimacy as she is. Keep it light, not tight.

On the other hand, she can process her own thoughts and feelings about Mike. Are those old lovers really that important in her life or were they just holding down some space until she found a really great guy like Mike to partner with? Is she really nonmonogamous by nature? If so, how does she want to handle this? How does she want to live? (single, in an open dyad, with a group?) How does she want to present herself and her lifestyle when she meets a new guy and starts going out with him? How can she be clear enough and discerning enough to avoid repeating her problems with Mike: getting into a relationship with a man who wants her to be something she can't be (monogamous)? Only through a personal values clarification process can she come to clarity with all these questions. It may take time and, probably, more direct experiences to even come close to being sure of her own lifestyle choices. But most importantly, this self-awareness must be an unending process, and honesty and directness must be guiding forces in her relationship with herself and others.

In the case of Janice and Buddy's marriage, they have a track record of being able to adventure together. They were able to embrace a major change in their relationship in the past, and now, faced with another, they may be able to use similar methods in coming to terms with this new one. Unfortunately, they didn't look ahead at some of the possible results of their open marriage. While it is possible for some people to remain in a primary dyad with outside secondaries for years without any real upsets, it is also quite common for one of the outside relationships to grow in importance and to create a conflict with the primacy of the original partnership. The resulting possibilities are 1) for the original couple to break up (one partner then coupling with the new partner); 2) for the couple to decide their relationship will remain primary (the involved partner either clearly keeps the outside lover secondary or actually breaks up that relationship) or; 3) the original couple can renegotiate their primacy together, allowing an additional outside primary (difficult logistically) or inclusion of the outside partner into the primary group (as in a group marriage).

Only emotionally mature or rapidly maturing people can lovingly handle the stress of this type of clarifying and negotiating. Old feelings of inadequacy, abandonment, being displaced, or having too many emotional demands all tend to surface in these situations. It takes determination, skill, and an incredible com-

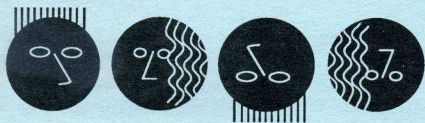
mitment to love over fear to truly feel, express and hear, negotiate win-win solutions, and to accept or work through all the emotional land-mines. Janice and Buddy have the additional pressure of Sarah herself to deal with. In the abstract, with another partner as a possible future choice, their negotiations would be less pressing and allow more time for each of them to assimilate the change at their own natural pace. With the presence of Sarah as a real live human being, the negotiations are now 3-way, and Sarah's fears and needs as the "outsider" will add an additional dimension to the process: more complexity.

If Buddy or Janice simply decide to pull out of their dyad, then it's just the standard script of serial monogamy being rerun yet one more time. If not, then typically, the first order is for Buddy and Janice to clarify their personal needs and then their relationship agreements, while Sarah comes to terms with her own personal desires and bottomlines. There are many creative possibilities, but they all depend on open minds and hearts expressing their true wishes and being willing to work together to achieve them. Janice may or may not be interested in group marriage. She may decide that as much as she likes being open, she really needs that feeling of being primary with one partner to feel comfortable. On the other hand, Sarah may decide that she really wants Buddy all to herself, and that if he won't leave his wife, then she's going to look for someone else. Buddy's male fantasy of having two women may be brought down to earth when he experiences a bit of overwhelm faced with two partners' emotional and sexual needs or if he feels left out while Sarah and Janice's relationship develops and they start spending more time together.

In each and every case, a person primarily needs to work on themselves first. A partner is not to blame for anything except following her/his own needs. And there is no return to relying on fantasies that a partner or lover will miraculously discover what you want or meet your needs. You must express them directly, and usually verbally to be explicit enough. Running on assumptions and expectations is decidedly dangerous ground. Beyond clarifying for yourself exactly what you want and do not want, and expressing this in a face-to-face, no bullshit discussion, next comes negotiating. Can you negotiate together, in strong yet loving ways, to achieve mutual benefit, to co-create a life each of you can find comfort and adventure together in? Anything less will be short term. It will not last the test of time with all the experiences life brings. If one partner truly wants more or different, then in time, the relationship must end or change

drastically. It is unwise and ungracious to ask a person to limit their life's desires in order to be partnered, or to allow someone to limit your life to stay partnered, except as a temporary measure. Mutual creative input and support really does allow for each person's significant needs to be met, and anything less is a simply a cooperative nightmare.

As to whether any particular marriage or partnership can be saved, it is all up to the people involved. If they can change, if they can learn more about themselves and express it, if they can listen to each other, if they can grow beyond old limiting beliefs and the weight of society's shoulds, if they can champion love over fear, then the sky's the limit and any marriage, whether it continues or concludes will be successful. ✦



Reader's Forum

DEAR PEP

Here are some of my thoughts on the lifestyle. Polyfidelity introduces an intense factor into relationships, in that it opens up the possibility with people that if you like each other a lot, if you seem to love each other, then theoretically at least, there is no obstacle to "getting married," to making that great movie-ending commitment formerly seen as a unique once-in-a-lifetime act: it puts you, in essence, into a state of potential courtship with everyone you meet.

There is extraordinary intensity to this the "fall-in-love-and-get-married" archetype is a powerful one. This is not a negative, but it is emotional fire, and a lot of heat is generated, to warm or to burn, depending on how it is related to. Not that it is so unique—we all sometimes play with sexual energy, flirt with it, toy with it; we enjoy attraction. What is unique about the dynamic in a polyfidelitous context is the implied possibility of acting on it and formalizing it. In the monogamous marriage paradigm, one's attractions could be placed in a number of ways, but an ongoing courtship relationship was not one of them: that kind of potentially endless courtship state—it differs from the varieties of cruise culminating in affairs or simple (ha!) one night stands—is one of the striking things about polyfidelity. It offers the possibility of relating to people as "the one" (in terms of the fall-in-love-with-the-one-and-get-married archetype) with all that

implies in fascination and heightened focus of energy, while at the same time enjoying a family life already.

It also offers the possibility of endless emotional complexity, frustration, and misguided effort, of course: the line beyond which possibility tumbles over into expectation and disappointment is approached again and again; and where a positive titillation has been built up, there can be a corresponding collapse into resentment or a reactive despair. There is an either/or quality to the courtship dynamic, a tendency toward all-or-nothing; it is prone to the whole roller-coaster ride, all the highs and lows; it strikes me often as a form of intoxication, as potentially addictive as any. Whether the expanded sense of potential enhances or inhibits relationships depends largely on the intelligence, consciousness and sensitivity of the people involved; and, perhaps, even more so, in the long run, on the depth and sophistication of the social context itself.

—UTAH

■ *Hello! You've accurately described a source of both joy and pain in polyfidelity. The possibility of getting to know and intimately love more than one person is part of the open and expansiveness of the lifestyle. However, the obligatory rejections routinely experienced when opening yourself to courtship again and again can take their toll. When looking for that rare bird, a person who can actually embrace both the concepts of committed intimacy and loving multiplicity, AND who, is also a compatible personal match, the chances for rejection of you and you as a person who lives this very different type of lifestyle grow to giant proportions.*

It takes much emotional maturity to learn to accept attraction as a positive feeling, a pleasant end in itself, when the attractive person(s) either doesn't reciprocate or does so only at a lighter level: friend or acquaintance instead of lover or partner.

—Ed.

DEAR PEP

I found few surprises at PEPCON 90. The people did not look noticeably different than at any other seminar on any other subject. They did have a different outlook on life, and not just on polyfidelity. One surprise was that my wife went along with me, another that she actually participated. We've been together 23 years, which is surprising in itself, but that has nothing to do with this. I've been mildly curious about polyfidelity for a couple of years and she has basically refused to even discuss it. We met in the Mormon church. She has been a life-long member, and I was a member for a short while.

In case you think that Mormons can identify with polyfidelity, think again. Most Mormon women ▶

cringe at the thought. The church, when it put polygamy on the back-burner, stated that it was just a matter of waiting until the time was right to bring it back. It also has hinted that the return and acceptance of polygamy would be one of the tests of the faithful. In case you planned to die before it returned, Heaven is polygamous. If your husband did not measure up, you're going to be attached to another. The other ("good") guys stand to collect quite an entourage.

A great suggestion at PEPCON was to do some self-analysis about the reasons for wanting to expand your family. She did it for me: pure lust. This may be substantially true, but I needed time to expand on this. Here is my list:

SEX: I had to list this first, otherwise you'd just scan down the list to see when I would get to it. I like it a lot. She liked cuddling a lot. Having two people improves my odds, even if the logistics and internal politics would probably not double the actual frequency. The thought of variety is appealing, but that feeling would fade after the initial exhilaration. She says sex is an expression of love; if I do it with someone else, it means I love her less. I prefer to love the person I have sex with.

LOVE: After 23 years, I don't see how I could love her less (don't go twisting that last sentence), but I do think I have room for another person as well. Could I love another as much? It may take another 23 years, but I could do a creditable job of it in the meantime. I subscribe to the idea that there'd be more love if shared three ways, but I have no quantitative way to prove that. If you love a second person, there shouldn't be any reason for your love for the first to be less. Actually, there has to be some impact, because you have to split some of your time. I guess the word is not "less love," but "less intimacy time," which covers both sex-time and other together-time.

FIGHTING: The flip side of love. In all those years we have done our share of fighting. Sometimes things were better after we made up, and it was worth it. A number of times things just gradually dropped, or a compromise or truce reached. How would another fit in? Would some of the same hassles have to be fought all over again? Would a new person be able to accept or even understand some of our crazy compromises? This time, would the balance of power tilt against me? This one worries both of us. Would we try to convince the new person that the other one is always at fault? Not a very good way to build a relationship.

COMPANIONSHIP: After all these years, we have said it all. Worse (or better?), I don't have to say what I think because she tunes into my brainwaves and says it for me. Having a new party around would force us to both become more vocal. I am a workaholic (part of the logistics referred to earlier). With a new family member, I'd be likely to initially spend a bit more time at home, while at the same time she would have an adult around when I was not. She has maintained ties with our kids who have moved out. I hadn't gotten around to mentioning "kids" yet. sort of having an expanded family. I am glad she has, but it is not the same as close contact with an adult who is in tune with your daily life.

RAISING KIDS: Seeing that the cat/kid is out of the bag. There are six or seven, depending on who counts, or when. Four still at home (19, 16, 10, 6) which makes you wonder who'd be crazy enough to voluntarily join this circus. We've both admitted that we are not the best of parents. We know how, but in the heat of battle the things that looked good on paper are forgotten. The (19, 16) are female type people. They side with my wife. They have pronounced me crazy (again) and perverted (still), and have hinted that any female addition to the family would have a "helluva" time of it. My feeling is that they are scared I'd find someone who would make them clean up after themselves. This probably means that any addition would have kids experience, which implies the possibility of bringing in additional children. If she has experience, she'd be crazy to ask for more. How do I justify having a "crazy" join my family? I won't discuss the small question about where to put more people in my already too small home, either.

ECONOMIC SECURITY: This one is the bottom of the list. I buy the idea that three can live as cheap as 2.64. What is the impact of adding one to six? Negligible. Three incomes are less interruptible than two. Who cares? That's why it's at the bottom of the list. On the other hand, I have a puritan outlook on some things. No one gets a free ride, so the new addition will have to do something besides supply evening cuddling. Sounds too mercenary, but I assume anyone compatible with us would also share some of these values.

My wife says that she can share a house with another female and family (as friends) to cut expenses, and probably live reasonably well on alimony, child support, and her wages. After all, I am the most expensive person in the house. If it turned out that she could relate sexually to the other woman, she

claims that she would then no longer need me around. Is that fair? Who said I was being selfish? Notice that I made a number of assumptions. The addition to the family is to be ONE and FEMALE. She has not requested it to be a male, even if I'd be open to it (sorry guys). There is only one planned addition (strike the word "planned," substitute "wished for" by me or "dream on" by her). We did discuss the Male addition possibility (wasn't that big of me?). She feels that she is more comfortable with serial monogamy, i.e., if he appeals to her, I'm out. No incentive to pursue that option at all.

Another assumption is that we'd continue to live in the same place. Economics (it's paid for, and my job is here) and schools (they're good, and I'd hate to move the kids around) are the main reasons. Now that this is down on paper it doesn't look as important.

STATUS QUO: For now, nothing is going to happen. I can't turn around and claim that I would not like another person around. My not recanting makes her uptight. I have agreed that she has to be the one to initiate it, to make sure she knows she has control of this. She, of course, says the issue is therefore dead. If any of you have seen a happy ending to such blocks, cheer me up with your story.

Now, for some of the surprises at PEPCON. The majority of attendees seemed to think that more was better, even though the feedback was that exceeding three people made the relationship a lot less stable, most seemed to be aiming for that. I am being realistic. I can't reach around a bigger group and still maintain intimacy. On the other hand, the possibilities are intriguing. On the third hand, if I get the go-ahead from my wife (remember: dream on) why not go for two? Another surprise was the number of guys attending who felt that they could relate bisexually. Being a Neanderthal European, I cannot foresee that for myself. I can relate to making love to a woman, and can project that to another woman making love to a woman. Cultural bias? More surprises...everyone paid lip-service to working out on paper what you are looking for and how you'll handle problems and breakups (i.e. prenuptials). No one seemed to actually do it, preferring to approach a potential partner in a more standard courtship routine. More romantic, less sensible.

Non-surprises: for the most part, attendees were white, college educated, economically stable, many working in people-oriented professions, with no young children to complicate things (some excep-

tions). Everyone paid lip-service to splitting household chores and nasty jobs evenly. I'll admit to trying to duck chores, which could be harder with a new partner keeping track. Of course, I do try to pass them on to the kids for the "educational value."

We may be to another PEPCON. My wife may come along again, if only to keep me from shopping. If, in the meantime, you have any suggestions to pass along to either of us, write to Jack L. c/o PEP. ❖

Did you know...

Peptalk is a place to share some of your thoughts, feelings and experiences with people who are very interested in and supportive of your lovestyle. Needs for privacy can be easily accommodated in letters to the editor, or in actual articles through the use of pen names. If you are a giving person who wants to share the wealth of experience you possess, or just have some thoughts, beliefs, doubts, or questions you'd like to air, send your contribution to *Peptalk* and be part of helping to build a nurturing culture for us all. ❖

Time to Grow Up?

“As a child you experience disapproval—your parents' criticizing, judging and evaluating you—as their parents did them. The parental disapproval syndrome, commonly called “family tradition,” cements your infant guilt, causing you to retreat into your mind and wonder what people will think of you before you act. You learn to deny your intuition in favor of pleasing the minds of people you think you need to survive. Of course, you secretly resent these people and tend to blame them for your own pattern of selling out.” (Bob Mandel)

When are you finally grown up? When do you let Mom and Dad actually see the real you instead of the nice son or daughter they want to see (and who you want them to see, too)? When do you finally love yourself enough to make your own decisions on what's important in your life, whether they approve or not? When do you love yourself enough to no longer hide your truest self and the partners who love that you? When do you stop making excuses that it's your parents you're trying to protect when it's your own fears and lack of self acceptance that cause you to keep on lying? What would happen if we all stopped pretending, at least with those people in our lives who we say we love most? Would the love be still be true or would there at least be truth? ❖

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