

## **5 KEYS TO OPEN RELATING - EVEN IF YOU ARE IN A MONOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIP**

By Katrina Elkins and Ben Roschke

Open-relating comes with a lot of interesting challenges. “You want WHAT?” “But I thought it would be like this.” “This isn’t what I thought it would be”.

When you lose the security and safety net of the standard roles of a monogamous relationship, you go into new territory that opens up everything. HENCE- the open relating.

Two years ago, I made a brave and bold move to ask Bryan, my life partner of 23 years, to move into an open relationship. It was something that I knew I had to do. And I can honestly say that today, I have learned the depths of who I am, and yet I feel like I know nothing more than when I started to fully open-relate.

I don’t hold back in sharing my desires, pain, love, and creative expressions. There have been many opportunities for growth in the past two years; and when the pain feels the most unbearable that is when things shift within making room for the new to come in.

Six months ago, I gave up on open-relating. It lasted a week. I realized that open-relating was about my expansion and personal growth. If I closed up I would be blocking the very things that I had asked to become a reality in my life. And deep down, I saw that my resistance to open-relating was actually fear of transforming my wounds into my pillars of strength.

Ben shared his desire to become part of a massive place of transformation. He expressed his desire to explore standing in power and surrendering in community. The alignment of our *F\*CK YESes* have given the three of us opportunity for exponential growth by revealing our strengths and deepest vulnerabilities.

We are bravely tackling the wounds of conditioning from over 40 years of walking this earth. We have experienced that through radical honesty with ourselves, we unwind the conditioning and experience our true essence and divine nature.

The following 5 keys have given us a roadmap within for creating a healthy relationship with self and with each other. Open-relating is about being WILLING to let transformation happen. It can be really LOUD. The things that I struggled with in my monogamous relationship with Bryan, can’t be swept under the rug. We all are growing stronger individually and as a triad.

For years, Bryan and I struggled with our monogamous relationship and yet, we felt like we had a depth of love that didn’t allow us to divorce or shift away from our commitment to each other. And with Ben in our lives as a committed partner, Bryan and I have been able to allow our relationship to die in the ways that we weren’t able to for 23 years. We have each had many funerals of ourselves in the last 2 years, since we opened our marriage.

The three of us are still working on unraveling the crutches of codependency related to our sexuality, self-expression, and spiritual growth. In our daily life, we trigger each other. Being able to hold space for the triggers so that we can address the underlying traumas/wounds/shadow allows the suffering to end.

Ben and I will share the 5 keys we have found to be fundamental in allowing loving, supportive relationships for ourselves, for our clients, and the communities we serve. These KEYS work. And if you are new to using these muscles, you need community to support you. This is not a GO-IT-ALONE. You need perspective and a safe container. We show you examples of what happens when you don't use these keys, and what happens when you do use them.

## **1.THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS OVER-COMMUNICATION**

Katrina: In relationships, we tend to get comfortable. We start to develop routines and shy away from stirring things up with voicing our desires.

We especially start to hide our deepest desires because we don't want to offend or experience rejection.

And that is exactly where things start to break down in the circuit of giving and receiving.

The thing that you are keeping secret or buried from your partner, is the one thing that must be shared with them. And the deepest, buried secrets are usually connected to our sexuality. We have shame. We have a feeling that we might get caught. Or worse yet, we feel that if we share it it will somehow take away the thrill of it.

When I asked for my relationship with Bryan to open, I was scared. I knew my life depended on it and I was hiding deep within me my own desires of sovereignty and joy. I had been experiencing a massive heart opening and a realization that I had the strongest desire to fly for most of my life. BUT I forgot that I had wings and I didn't know that my love of flying was connected to my sexuality.

### ***Why do we stop voicing our truth?***

After I voiced my desires for an open relationship, three weeks later, I was crushed with abandonment. The person that had showed up in my life and opened my world like lightning - inspiring my decision to ask for an open relationship - decided that he needed to leave.

Then, the depth of my wounds showed up. My sexual trauma from when I was five years old finally revealed itself. I broke out in a rash, all over my body, that showed my boundaries were crossed as a young child.

My life depended on my honesty. There was nothing that would stop my growth if I shared bravely my truth and honesty.

When we have desires to connect with others and we hide it, we FEED our insecurities of not being good enough or the subconscious shaming and feelings of scarcity deep within.

In our work in The Elemental Lifestyle, we have seen the shame wrapped around desires with the couples and individuals we support. The honesty and communication opens up our deepest wounds and brings them to be transmuted in the light.

Honesty takes commitment to oneself to be completely open about the things that pull you out of alignment. Can you truly be honest with yourself? If not, you cannot be honest with your partner(s). PERIOD. And that is where the separation happens creating the great divide in oneself and within our relationships.

If you are not voicing your desires, the back door is wide open. You create scenarios where the subconscious wounding takes over. We hurt the ones we love the most. Rapes, violence, sexual traumas, and addictions take over our lives. We cross our own boundaries and the boundaries of others in order to stay in hiding. Because at the core of it, we believe that we are not good enough to experience the kind of joy and bliss that we crave to experience in community and individually.

We tell ourselves “We have to get it now in any way we can because there might not be enough for me.”

Can you be honest with your scarcity, insecurities, desires, sexuality, and wounds?

A beautiful thing happens when you can open up your voice and bravely share your truth. Life unfolds. Your visions start to become a reality. A woman’s yoni is connected to her throat, her voice. Our voices need places to express themselves. The best thing about being honest with yourself, you start to open up channels for your voice to be heard.

Within a few months of opening my relationship, I started my podcast, The Elemental Lifestyle. It allowed me to share my most vulnerable truths and explorations of my sexuality, self-expression, and self-love.

Imagine what can happen for you, if you are ABSOLUTELY 100% honest with yourself? The Answer, Everything and Anything.

## **2. THE PAST IS FIXED; FORGIVE AND MOVE ON**

Ben: One aspect that we can get fixated on with structures is the past. Previous actions that may have caused pain can be held onto. Likewise, the structure of a relationship can also be a

point of fixation. I've seen it happen in my relationships and have seen it with the clients that we serve.

A man complains that arguments with his partner quickly devolve into a string of offenses and transgressions, some incredibly minor, all recalled in very specific detail stretching back years into the past. A sense permeates that the relationship has been overwhelmed by an accumulation of wrongs that, while minor, individually constitute a death by a thousand cuts. He feels despair and hopelessness set in.

A woman complains that her partner is incapable of change or growth. That over the course of the relationship she has developed and grown as a person - that she now feels stifled and yearns to change the structures to allow her more space and ease, but he can't figure out why they can't "just go back to the way things were" when they first started dating. And if he changes his habits to accommodate her, it is only for a short-time and at the first opportunity - he reverts back to the old ways. She ends up feeling trapped and constricted.

Both cases are examples of partners holding onto the past too tightly. Forming an idealized conception around moments of bliss. Or placing outplaced significance on single instances as harbingers of future intent or inevitability.

Open relating requires both partners to be fully in the NOW. And with that presence in the NOW it is important to be willing to let go of conceptions of the past. Positive or negative experiences - everything in the past is fixed and in one form or another has led to the NOW. Honoring that realization without fixating on the past allows for so much more ease in the present.

These were traps that I fell into repeatedly in my past relationship - holding onto concepts of what the structure of the relationship was desiring it to be fixed in place. When Katrina and Bryan came to San Jose - I had to check myself on this too.

We had spent only a short time together in the physical previously, two weeks in January in Athens. Logically I knew that it was going to be different having them in California. Athens had been a vacation - a contained amount of time with all of us free in community forgoing work largely to enjoy the limited time we all had together. In San Jose, we would be together but it wouldn't be a permanent vacation; there would be more time constraints on a daily basis but there would not be the overriding sense of a limited number of days together.

Even knowing that logically, I still became aware in the early days of the arrival that I was yearning for the relationship to feel like it did in Athens. For there to be ease and perhaps a sense of urgency in connection. And it caused some frustration and dissonance for both of us.

I became aware that I was holding onto expectations of past relationships - what was a "honeymoon" phase supposed to feel like. What were signs based on past experiences that this was going to be a relationship that "worked" or "didn't work." Was I repeating past mistakes that

had broken previous relationships apart. I had to forget the past and forgive; I especially had to forgive myself for my past imperfections in relationships. And Katrina had to do the same.

Then we truly opened to the awareness that everyday is a new day and a new opportunity to define our relationship. That past commitments or results did not define our love and every moment was, in fact, a new opportunity to define our commitment to each other. And in this awareness - we found a new ease and sense of excitement and play in our union.

### **3. OWNING YOUR F\*CK YES (AND YOUR REDLINES) IN THE NOW**

Ben: Personal responsibility is a phrase that makes the inner-teengaer in all of us cringe, but it is such a fundamental aspect of open-relating. Standing in your power to take thoughtful and deliberate control of those things that are essential to your well being while creating strong but loving boundaries for those things are beyond your control is critical to developing your highest potential.

This kind of radical ownership of self is something that many of us have conditioned out of ourselves in a variety of ways. Most of the structures of our modern society have been built to strip us of our sovereignty: a culture that equates consumption with happiness; religious / political / societal structures that prescribe specific roles, rules and behaviors to achieve acceptance; and a economic system that desires to turn us into machines to improve corporate profits and bottom lines.

A little over a year ago I felt it. I was so entrapped in various systems of control that I acutely felt where I had given almost all of my power away. I felt trapped, depressed, hopeless, and utterly alone. I felt like I had no idea what my purpose was - where joy in my life existed or what were the things that would make me feel complete.

I just knew something had to change.

It felt like external forces were controlling me and I was failing at meeting them. Issues with alcohol, a failing relationship, dissatisfaction with my life purpose, a general sense of hopelessness. All of these permeated my life and led me to despair.

But it was in learning to stand in my own power where I began to unravel some key insights. Those external things that felt like limitations on myself were actually only limitations in so much as I had given them the power to be limiting. AND, that while I felt that I had no idea what my purpose was - the truth was that I KNEW deep within what my desires were that were in alignment with my highest self and potential.

Stepping into truly owning my power - acknowledging and taking ownership of fostering those things that were in deep alignment with me led to me finding a place within my work with Katrina and Bryan in helping others. And helped to lead me to a place of deep connection and love in a

family unit that provides so many expressions and outlets of joy and bliss. The pillars of my own highest and best life that are truly my *F\*CK YES*.

Likewise, learning those things that were not in alignment with me - or recognizing those forces that were beyond my control - and creating strong boundaries helped me to rediscover my creativity, life force and sense of self. Standing in my power to create strong boundaries helped to cleanse those things from my life that were not in alignment or actively harming me. They also assisted in releasing those things that I do not have the power to influence or change - so that I didn't take responsibility for things that aren't mine.

Delving into open-relating, the necessity of standing in power has become even more evident. As I integrated into daily life with Katrina, Bryan and the kids - there were feelings of scarcity coming through. My inner child worried loudly about the scarcity of time and attention. With the balancing of work, raising children, personal needs and a multiplicity of partners - how was I going to get the attention I needed for happiness?

The truth is that owning the responsibility for my own *F\*CK YES* is knowing that the only place that can ever truly have scarcity is in my own self love. In other words, all of the abundance and fulfillment I need for my best life already dwells within me. We enter into relationships not because we have a lack of something that we need another to provide. It is because we have an abundance within ourselves that we wish to share with others and that in that sharing we create powerful resonances with the abundance within those others that bring more light into the world.

Likewise, knowing my own boundaries has helped me to hold the space for Katrina and Bryan in the development of their relationship. Knowing that their relationship is their own journey and one that I can hold a space of loving support for while not taking ownership of their interpersonal dynamics.

Owning my desires and my boundaries has opened me up to abundance and balance within myself and a powerful bond of love and family.

#### **4. EMBRACING THE POWER OF UNCERTAINTY AS A FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP**

Katrina: Certainty is the one thing that we crave when we are in a chaotic situation. We want to know if we are going to be ok. We want to know that there is a light at the end of a tunnel. We crave to know if the people we love will be with us forever.

The one thing that I do know in my 44 years, is that I have grieved the deaths of many that I have loved. My sister, mother, father, grandparents and two spirit children. I have grieved others, that I loved with all my heart. And I am here to say: "the reality is that we will grieve most of our relationships."

Whether the person actually dies a physical death or you decide to part ways because of your evolution/transformation there will be a grieving process. Grief is certain. Love is a choice. And with love comes a lot of uncertainty.

Requiring certainty is the coffin that holds the death of your relationship. Certainty takes away the joy and fun of change in your relationship. Everyday, everything is constantly changing. This is the natural, universal part of birth/death/creation. The roses blooming in the garden, the salmon dying after returning to the streams of where they were born.

To fully be in a relationship, is to be in a relationship with yourself. You will be in relationship with yourself, until your very last breath. That is certain.

I have seen my own heartache and my need for certainty.

And today, as a globe, we are being served a large dose of uncertainty. We are being asked to examine, in detail, the uncertainty we are scared of in our closest relationships.

The places where we connected in community were once the watering holes that celebrated the easy path. Now, we have been forced to find new ways of connecting with the eager anticipation of being a part of the large events and gatherings.

This is a mirror for us all. Have you been able to find new ways of connecting with your partner(s)? Have you allowed the explorations within yourself?

I have found that many have been able to dive deeper into themselves. It has been a perfect opportunity to understand our desires, creative force, and essence. Our life-force is our sexuality. And the most incredible gift our sexuality offers us is the unexpected ways that it can be channeled into all the things that we love. Our art, dance, movement, creative juices are all about allowing uncertainty.

What if your relationships are asking you to connect in different ways? Over the last six weeks, many have found new ways of connecting and nurturing their relationships in ways they haven't allowed themselves to explore. Becoming vulnerable and voicing their desires has been a common theme for most everyone in The Elemental Lifestyle.

When we surrender to the creative connection we have to the Universal Energy we celebrate the divine with us. And when you celebrate the uncertainty of your creations in this life, you can embrace the uncertainty of your relationships. There is a greater ease in grieving, because you know there is birth and renewal on the other side.

This past month, I have allowed the uncertainty of my relationship with Bryan to unfold. I let go of taking on the responsibility that wasn't mine to hold. And both of us started to stand in power.

I released my desire for certainty in the potential of him abandoning me. He had to start voicing his deepest desires and truth with me and Ben. I had to be really honest about my abandonment wound. In my relationship with Bryan, I had been dealing with this fear that he would leave me for another woman. I had to trust my muscles of standing in my power and then letting the surrender happen. There was a grieving of my old self that needed to take place. The places where my inner child needed certainty in my relationships.

TRUTH BOMB: If I allow change, I allow the structures that have required certainty in my relationships to die. Uncertainty is embracing the unexpected love that awaits you in all areas of life.

And that is a gift to everyone in our relationships. The structure isn't as important as the connection and commitment to LOVE is in your life.

Certainty shows us that it is the unknown that prevents us from surrendering into the beauty of LIVING. It is time to fully embrace uncertainty, grieve, and LOVE again.

## **5. BRINGING SOFTNESS TO ALL IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS - YOUR PARTNER(s) and YOU.**

Katrina: Anger can rule you. And it can rule and spoil the most precious relationships.

Resentment for all the times that your partner(s) have crossed your boundaries and created deep pain.

The pain has to be exposed. And it needs to be held in a container of support in community.

For years, I felt my Feminine. The softness in my heart. But there was a lot of hurt that had accumulated in my relationship with myself, in denying the truth of my heart. It spread out into the hurt within my relationship with Bryan.

I hid my desire to love many from myself, and definitely with Bryan. I locked myself up. Autoimmune issues, adrenal fatigue, and stress made me become hard and confined. I started to control things that created scenarios that pulled me out of alignment with the softness of my heart.

Where has the hurt in your life spilled over into your ability to connect with your heart?

Transformation requires you to be connected to your heart. The softness of a fluffy bunny is absolutely everyone's birthright.

YES, the softest place of love in your heart is your birthright.



The key to allowing the softness to show up in your heart, means you have to have boundaries, created out of love.

When you can hold the space of love and compassion for another person in their most vulnerable wound, without making it about you, your life begins to transform.

Within the relationships I am building with Bryan and Ben, if any insecurities or wounds come up in the now, we hold the space for honest and brave conversations. And we hold deep compassion for the wound of the inner child that shows up within us. We know that our inner children are not the ones that get to make the decisions for our life. And we have to be willing to identify and love our shadows in order to be our sovereign selves. The king/queen within us has to show up and make the decisions.

***So what do these KEYS look like for us and how can they support you?***

Katrina: We have leaned into these keys over the past month as we have integrated into a life together in San Jose.

Practicing open communication and complete honesty has allowed us to confront and hold our deepest wounds and traumas in community. We have learned the importance of releasing past attachments, both in myself and Bryan's union and Ben with his past relationships. Through dedicated work (with outside support and community) we have identified the places we need support to fully run our circuits while establishing strong boundaries to ensure that no one feels compromised or excluded within the triad. Releasing expectations of certainty and surrendering in acceptance to those things beyond our control has opened us to a greater abundance. And allowing our softness and compassion - first with ourselves and then with others around us - has helped to form and solidify our commitments to our new, loving family.

This is an ongoing practice that we get to participate (but never master) on a daily basis. We are excited to explore and refine these deep places of connection and feel fortunate and blessed to be able to assist others in their own journeys of love and discovery.

The biggest shift that has happened for us is to know that we can celebrate in our joy. Open-relating is about inclusion. It is about growing the capacity to receive and give joy in alignment with our visions, desires, and higher selves.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS:**

Katrina Elkins and Ben Roschke are (with Bryan Elkins) creators of the Elemental Lifestyle - an open-source community dedicated to helping individuals discover their *F\*CK YES* and opening their lives to the power of love and community. Katrina is a best-selling author and life-purpose alignment and intimacy coach. With Ben and Bryan, the Elemental Lifestyle helps individuals

and romantic partners (of all varieties) reach alignment with their highest life purpose and themselves through coaching and radical approaches to somatic healing. Learn more about the Elemental Lifestyle and its three signature programs: *MILK*, *HONEY*, and *THE WILD* at: <http://theelementallifestyle.net>