



Weekly Study Groups

Group leaders can use supplemental materials provided by Lynne for weekly sessions. Each week focuses on selected readings from *The Bond*, along with discussion points for goals, and experiential exercises that creatively bring the teachings to life for participants.

Week 1: The Superorganism: Changing Our story

Reading Preparation: Prologue, Introduction and Chapters 1 through 4 of *The Bond*.

This weekly topic introduces the basic principles of *The Bond*: that Nature's most basic drive is for global cooperation and unity, not competition. *The Bond* discloses that things in the universe are not "individual" in any sense of the term. In every area of our lives, from the smallest particles of our being to our relationships and communities, there is a Bond – a connection so integral and profound that there is no longer a clear demarcation between the end of one thing and the beginning of another.

Nature has designed us as a vast interconnected superorganism and hardwired us to share, care and be fair, and not to compete. Everything, from subatomic particles to simple-celled organisms to the most distant stars in the galaxy, all are part of this indivisible Bond. This week, we will explore the basic principles of *The Bond*:

- how all of life has been designed for connection, not competition
- why it's not the "thing," but the space *between*, that matters

Weekly Goal: to *change our story* – to understand how all of life has been designed for connection, not competition, and to explore how a new story of who we are changes how we should relate to others, in our relationships and communities.

Discussion topics:

- Discuss the implications of new discoveries in physics showing that there is no such thing as an individual thing, but only relationships.
Challenge: Discuss how it would change your view of the world to think of everything in the world as one interconnected whole.
- Explore the idea that we are created 'from outside in' – that our bodies are created through so many complex interactions with their environment that they cannot be considered to exist independently.
Challenge: How has your Bond with your environment changed aspects of your body and your health, compared with those of your parents?
- Discuss the idea that we are part of an 'intergalactic superorganism' and that our health, our mental stability, and possibly even much of what we consider our uniquely individual behavior or motivation are partly at the whim of solar activity.
Challenge: How does this change our views of human motivation and current notions of individualism?

- We now understand that we understand the actions of others by simulating the entire experience in our brains via mirror neurons — *as though it were happening to us*.
Challenge: How does this knowledge affect our understanding of our own thought processes as a wholly individual process?
- How have ideas about individualism and competition in nature affected our societal structures? How have Darwinian theories permeated our everyday lives? In what areas of your life do you feel competition most acutely?
Challenge: How would you change societal structures to be more cooperative?

Week 2: Born to Belong

Reading preparation: Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of *The Bond*.

Humanity is profoundly tribal; we feel most at home in small clusters in which we are a part of the whole. The need to move beyond the boundaries of ourselves as individuals and to bond with a group is so primordial and necessary to a human being that it remains the key determinant of whether we remain healthy or get ill, even whether we live or die.

Weekly goal: To examine why sharing and caring is essential to our good health and explore new ways that we can flourish individually *only* when we move beyond speaking, seeing and relating for just ourselves.

Discussion topics

- Why is the lone-wolf, all-American hero a perfect candidate for a heart attack?
Challenge: Not all heroes in American culture represent striving for an individualistic goal but promote a sense of unity among all people. One example is James Stewart, who plays George Bailey in 'It's a Wonderful Life.' Can you think of others?
- Why is belonging so important to people and 'excessive individuation' so dangerous?
Challenge: Remember a time when you were have felt left out or excluded or a member of your group of yours was excluded. Why did it happen? How did it affect you or her/him, emotionally and physically? What could you have done differently to promote greater unity within the group?
- How do bad and good moods of others affect us at home or at work?
Challenge: This week, observe what happens to your mood and body language when you are in the presence of someone in a bad mood. Write it down and discuss it with the group next week.
- What are some examples of how community is the best medicine that we have, even during hard times?
Challenge: What new groups can you join this month, or strengthen through becoming more involved with them?

- We are told that human beings are innately selfish. What new evidence shows the reverse – that we were hardwired to share, care and be fair?
Challenge: Do something kind or altruistic for someone this week. Monitor what is happening to you, physically and emotionally, when you do

Group activity: Decide on three measures each one of you can take to strengthen the closeness of this group.

Week 3: The Unifying Effect of Fairness

Reading preparation: Chapter 8 of *The Bond*, plus downloads of *The Fairness Campaign* and *The 10 Fairness Principles* from www.thebond.net.)

Fairness burns deep within the hearts of each and every one of us; neuroscientists have even discovered an “it’s not fair” spot in the human brain. Consequently, ideas about fairness appear to be universal. People in most societies and citizens of all political persuasions have ideas about fairness that are surprisingly identical. By ‘fair,’ most of us mean just reward for just effort and an equal chance for everyone.

In our hearts we know what is fair.

Our survival depends upon our ability to to create a situation of ‘just desert’ – that we are commensurately rewarded for our efforts (or punished for our wrongdoing) and that each of us are given a turn. The extent to which any local or national community begins to fray relates to a deterioration of a sense of fairness and basic reciprocity.

Nevertheless, fairness is a practice that promotes unity in any community and can be easily restored. Scientific studies shows that in any society, if a culture of turn-taking falls apart with too many taking too much, all it requires is a *small group of individuals committed to strong reciprocity* to re-establish fairness and create a unified and highly cohesive community.

Weekly goal: To explore how to re-establish fairness in your life, in your community, your workplace and in your country.

Discussion Points:

- What is fairness and how is it different from across-the-board sameness or socialism?
Challenge: Based on your definition of fairness, please identify which current local and national practices are fair and which are unfair. What would you like to change?
- Why is fairness so essential in every community and why does it unite people?
Challenge: Can you see any association between some of the challenges and problems in your community and fairness or unfairness?
- What happens to the social fabric in nations when there is a large sense of unfairness?
Challenge: In America (or the country you live in), how have certain unfair practices hurt wealthy and poor alike?

- What do you consider unfair in your own life?
Challenge: What are some ways that you can become a game changer to encourage fairness and fair practices in your workplace, neighborhood or community?

Weekly Practice: Learn the 10 Principles of Fairness and come up with a list of ways to apply them at home, in your neighborhood and on the job as a means of strengthening community.

Week 4: From ‘Me’ to ‘We’: A Slight Shift of Perception Transforms Relationships and Promotes Unity

Reading preparation: Chapters 9 and 10 of *The Bond*

We like people who are just like we are —who share our own values, our attitudes, our personalities and even our emotional dispositions — and we tend to conflict most with people who are not like us. This tendency to cluster with people who are most like we are only serves to divide us from others by reinforcing our individuality, our sense that our way is the best.

Once we view ourselves as a part of a bigger whole, we begin to act differently toward each other. When we can learn to change our perspective, and offer ourselves as a vehicle of service to the connection, we can easily find the deeper Bond always present and embrace difference within that larger definition of connection.

This week we’ll concentrate on learning some relating skills that will enable you offer yourself as a vehicle of service to the pure experience of connection without judgment or prejudice shaped by your thoughts.

Lesson goal: To explore techniques of relating that allow you to make deep connections with anyone – even those who disagree with everything you stand for.

Lesson exercise: To practice the power of deep truth and candid disclosure in order to promote closeness and unity. During this type of deep sharing, the pull of wholeness builds trust and loosens attachment to entrenched positions.

Discussion Points:

- How does our Western way of promoting the individual block us from seeing another version of reality? What can survivors of the 2004 Tsunami can teach us about taking a more holistic view of our actions?
Challenge: Think of some of your actions and how they impact across your community.
- Discuss the art of sawubona and what it means to say to someone else, ‘we see you.’
Challenge: Divide into pairs and repeat ‘We see you’ and reply with ‘We see you, too.’ At that moment, vow to do whatever you can to allow your partner to thrive. How does that change your view of the relationship?

- What does the author Lynne McTaggart mean by ‘aerial vision’?
Challenge: Think of a time when you and another person vehemently disagreed on something. What was their version of reality and your version, and what is the ‘aerial’ truth of both sides?
- Discuss the art of dialogue, how it differs from ordinary discussion, and how it overcame polarization among the pro-life and pro-choice activists in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Challenge: Discuss some of the assumptions you make about your version of what’s ‘real.’ How much of it is based on cultural conditioning and belief?
- Why is deep sharing so powerful in relationships? How does it help with forgiveness and re-establishing connection, as it did with a former member of the Hitler youth movement and the daughter of a Holocaust survivor?
Challenge: Divide into pairs and practice sharing deeply about things you really care about. What do you notice about how you feel about the other person?

Weekly Exercise: In your group, practice having a dialogue about a contentious subject (abortion, the Tea Party, gun control, etc). Remember the rules:

- Don’t reach a decision or have a debate
- Take turns speaking – don’t monologue
- Be alert to your own reactions when something is said you don’t agree with
- Be fully present
- Don’t judge

Week 5: People Who Fire Together Wire Together

Reading preparation: Chapter 11 of *The Bond*

This week we use the Robber’s Cave Experiment to examine the power of a larger, communal (‘superordinate’) goal and how it can transform the atmosphere in your neighborhood or office from ‘me against them’ to ‘all of us pulling together.’ It may also touch upon the power of the larger goal to revitalize any social situation – in your office or neighborhood – and create a close-knit and cooperative community.

You may also wish to explore specific practices that may turn your community into a communal ‘savings’ bank, to ease individual worries during hard times and create bonding in the process.

The scientific evidence shows that people who fire together wire together; whenever a group works together for a common goal, the brains of all parties begin to get on the same wavelength — strengthening the bond within the group.

Engaging in sharing and teamwork tends to transcend differences, because it emphasizes the very heart of humanity — *we are all in this together*. Coming together in small groups with a superordinate goal provides a social cohesion beyond money, job or size of property.

Shared activity also creates a ramped-up endorphin release in us, raising pain thresholds, improving individual efforts and ultimately raising our game.

Discussion topics

- What are the lessons of the Robber's Cave Experiment for today?
Challenge: think of a superordinate goal that your group could pursue in your community in order to unite people who are presently polarized.
- Why does a 'superordinate goal' unite people so well?
Challenge: What practices might you suggest to transform the atmosphere in your office from 'me against them' to 'all of us pulling together'?
- What tips can you gain from the South Africa's rugby and Oxford's rowing teams, the Chilean Miners, the Tailholt experience with their community water pipeline and Nour Hakkim, the Syrian translator, about creating more united community?
Challenge: Can you think of three communal practices to establish in your neighborhood as a way of making your neighborhood safer, more vibrant – and closer?
- In Okinawa, the Japanese like to handle their money through a 'moai,' turning a trusted set of friends of neighbors into a savings bank. How could we adapt this idea in our neighborhoods?
Challenge: Think of three ways to create a neighborhood 'savings bank,' to help each other when times are hard. The bank doesn't have to hold money, but can help with back yards or house repair.

Weekly exercise: As a group, decide on a specific project in your community about which people of all religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds and political persuasions feel equally passionate. Set up a committee to begin working on getting the project underway. Once you have the basics of the project, organize another committee whose job is to invite people of differing beliefs or cultures to join in the project. Take note of whether working together for a common goal begins to bring you closer together.

Week 6: Generosity and Fairness: the Global Game Changer

This week explores ways that each of you within your group or congregation can become 'spiritual citizens' and transform your own life's purpose from 'me and mine alone' to 'we.' The session should examine how each of us can become a powerful change agent through tiny 'do-something' actions and investigate the extraordinary and infectious power of generosity to transform a business or neighborhood. Simple everyday acts of generosity enable you to become a powerhouse of change, permanently shifting the culture of greed and materialism around you.

Reading Preparation: Chapter 12 of *The Bond*

Lesson goal: To explore the extraordinary and infectious power of generosity to create inherent trust in your community or workplace.

Discussion topics

- What are the most important lessons to be learned from the experiences of Nipun Mehta, who transformed from a classic Silicon Valley 'turk' on a six-figure salary to a global 'game changer' running international CharityFocus?

Challenge: Which are the most important ways that you could become a change agent in your daily life?

- How can each one of us set off a contagion of giving and cooperative behavior in our neighborhood or office?

Challenge: Think of several ways that you can use generosity as an extraordinary and infectious power to create inherent trust in your neighborhood.

- Describe why one tiny act of kindness — a bit of change left in a Coke machine — caused a wave of generosity throughout a vast corporation and affected an entire community. What happens to a culture of selfishness in the face of a few ‘change agents’ who re-establish generosity and reciprocity?

Challenge: Design several acts you can do that might be able to set off a contagion of change.

- How can partnerships (like the John Lewis Partnership) be used to unite communities?

Challenge: Can you arrange your project you are currently working on as a partnership with no one in charge?

Weekly exercise: Design three specific pay-it-forward actions in your neighborhood, community or workplace that set off a contagion of giving and cooperative behavior. Report back to the group on the results.

Week 7: From Local to Global

In our final week we examine ways to move from the old zero-sum paradigm (I win, you lose’) to the six principles of The Bond (‘I win *and* we all win’) globally. We also explore the power of designing superordinate goals to connect with and evolve with other groups around the world. This lesson also focuses on the ‘Nash Equilibrium’ (‘What’s Best for Me – and the Group’) to design goals that promote unity with others from different cultures or belief systems.

This can be illustrated by the story of the mathematician John Nash as portrayed in the movie *A Beautiful Mind* (detailed in chapter 8 of *The Bond*) in which Nash realizes that the Adam Smith model of ‘Every Man for Himself’ is wrong. The best result is comes, he says, when everyone in the group does what’s best for himself . . . *and* the group.

Reading Preparation: Chapter 8, 11 and 12 of *The Bond*.

Lesson Goal: To explore how moving from a paradigm of exclusion (I win-you lose, ‘Us vs. Them’) to inclusion (‘I Win and We All Win,’ ‘Us + them’) offers a powerful tool for connection and to bring these ideas out to the wider community.

THE OLD PARADIGM

- Life is a zero-sum game (I win-you lose)
- What’s in it for me
- I must win, dominate or be first
- I look after my own, period

- **Us vs. Them**
- **We do best for society by looking out for Number 1**

THE 6 PRINCIPLES OF THE BOND

- **I win *and* we all win**
 - **How can I serve?**
 - **I choose to connect, whatever it takes**
 - **I look after my own *and* the group**
 - **Us + them**
 - **We do best for society by looking out for ourselves AND the rest of our community**
- Discuss the bar scene from the film *A Beautiful Mind*, detailed in chapter 9 of *The Bond*, when Nash realizes that your best action anyone can take is not only what's best for himself but also best for the group.
Challenge: What are some ways to take this idea and apply it to your neighborhood, workplace or community?
 - What do the lessons of the Nash Equilibrium and other examples of game theory teach us about our current paradigm (I win-you lose)?
Challenge: Discuss one area that is currently 'every man for himself,' and design it now as 'every man for himself . . . and the group.' How would it work then?
 - Engage in a bit of blue-skying. What would it look like to have businesses that work together, and not in competition?
Challenge: Discuss ways to incorporate these ideas into your own workplace or a community organization.
 - Discuss the old and new paradigms listed above and where they are present in our neighborhoods and communities, businesses and political system.
Challenge: Can you design new ideas in your communities that incorporate the 'us + them' ideas of the Bond paradigm into our everyday lives?
 - How might this new paradigm be used politically to improve aspects of society?
Challenge: Describe how the 'us + them' model might unite people of different political persuasions.

Weekly Exercise: Design a superordinate 'us + them' goals to encompass the needs of your community and then several communities inside and outside of AGNT. Begin making plans to put it into practice. Continue reporting back to the group on progress.