

Bonded to What?

by
Michael Mendizza



Mainstream parenting, compulsory schooling and organized religion share a common goal – conditioning, modifying and training the hearts and minds of children – quoting Alice Miller, for their own good, of course. To accomplish this each and most every other cultural institution employ the same tactics – comparison, threats, praise, punishment and rewards, done primarily to maintain that institution’s place in the social order – often at the expense of the child’s true development.

The spinal tap of these high stakes strategies reaches deep inside and gains power by triggering our most primal survival reflex – fear of not being wanted, rejection and abandonment, for life is relationship. Not being related is suicidal.

But what is it that is being compared, praised and rejected? It is the image we create and maintain about our self and this image reflects our status in the prevailing culture just as the cultural institution maintains its position by conforming to its image.

Everything is caught in the same net and remains caught by identifying itself with its cultural image. And in the struggle to live up to that image - we forget it is an image.

New human beings are born prematurely, compared to other species, to accommodate our large brain. Most species begin to walk in a few days. Human babies don’t achieve this level of self sufficiency for a year or more. Belonging and bonding is a matter of life and death, a visceral fact and never forgotten.

Babies observe and mimic adult gestures and later behavior. Matching modeled behavior wins smiles, hugs and implicit praise – bonding and belonging. Not matching is frowned upon - rejection.

As each accepting-belonging and rejection-abandonment gesture is registered in the developing brain a cultural image of self begins to emerge. Constantly gazing in the mirror of relationship, the baby is drawn and shaped by its interpretation of approval and rejection. The mature self-image is no different. Who we think and feel we are is not what we really are, rather it is, most often, a reflection of how we experienced our behavior being accepted or rejected by others.

Nature’s wisdom runs deep. She assumes that the adult has mastered his or her environment. For the young mimicking the adult’s mastered response is a quick recipe for survival. That is nature’s design and it worked for millions of years.

Bonding to What?

Page 2

50,000 years ago, more or less, something changed. The new brain (neocortex) grew dramatically and with it came adult behaviors based on abstract beliefs rather than concrete sensory experiences, pleasure and pain, and the feelings these experiences generate, affection and fear. Patterns of knowledge, belief, and behavior were based on symbolic thought and social learning; in a word, culture emerged. And with that emergence the bonding-belonging survival reflex, approval and rejection, and most importantly the self-image spawned by this reflex, began to reflect abstract cultural values, beliefs and behaviors. We began bonding to culture as much or more than to people, the behavior of people in this sense expressing and representing a particular culture. And all of this has been taking place beneath the level of our conscious awareness for centuries.

The curious thing is the way the bonding-survival reflex acts upon cultural beliefs morphing them into our self image. Attack Christianity and a Christian feels personally assaulted. You may place your life in danger denouncing a particular name or color in a gang infested neighborhood. Cultural images and beliefs have a way of seeping onto our personal identity. It is really not a mystery. That is the way our personal image of self was created and this curious fact is the source of centuries and centuries of insane and violent behavior. And it is here that hope for real transformation rests.

Like corporations cultures, once created, take on a life of their own. Individual people come and go but the dominate forms that make up the culture remain. This would be great if the forms that make up a culture were based in wisdom and true intelligence. But they are not.

Intelligence is a state of the body and mind - not a belief. Emerging from this state insights may surface and become beliefs but those beliefs are not intelligence. In order to maintain any connection to their original source fixed beliefs must constantly be dipped in the living pool of intelligence and be born again and in new ways that are appropriate to this moment rather than the past. But they are not.

The Inquisition was an act of culture, not wisdom or intelligence, and it lasted over 300 years. More bloodshed and violence has been born out of culture and belief than any natural cause. And we and our children are bonded to that - culture.

Culture is the context upon which our feeling approved of or rejected is based. Who we think we are, the self-image we justify and defend throughout life, is a reflection of culture. And culture uses this image to modify and control our behavior by manipulating our deep need to belong. This is done primarily through organized religion, compulsory schooling and mainstream parenting – all of which are again, most often, handmaidens of culture rather than one's deep wisdom or innate intelligence.

Bonding to What?

Page 3

Remember the early studies on imprinting. At a given point, very early in life, baby ducks would line up and follow anything that moved. Nature assumed that the leader being followed was mother and a duck. Researchers substituted themselves at this critical moment and baby ducks imprinted to the researcher rather than to the mother.

New human beings would do the same if wisdom and innate intelligence provided the mirror in which they saw themselves rather than the prejudices and taboos of culture.

Yes – babies must belong, they must bond - but to what, the implicit and growing madness that culture represents, the Arab and the Jew, the Christian and the Hindu, the Republican and the Democrat, the black, the white, and the gangs and nationalism? Isn't that what organized religion, compulsory schooling and mainstream parenting do – bond our identity to this madness?

Look at what we have done and are doing. Every break in our bond with life, with nature, increases our feeling of isolation, depression and even rage, and each of these adds to culture's coffers, its influence in our lives. The majority of pregnancies are unplanned. Technological birth, the buzzing sounds, flashing lights, the gloved strangers coming and going, synthetic substitutes for nature's hormones injected that neutralize any hope for a natural ecstatic birth and the bonding that shared ecstasy promotes lifelong. Womens' liberation generated billions in new taxes but did nothing to support mothering, quite the contrary, it separated by design entire generations of infants from their mothers, placed them in government certified programs, early and extended childcare, often supervised by complete strangers. That sounds good for bonding.

The shared meaning of storytelling was replaced by commercial television. Today's children have more eye contact with violent television characters than their own parents. Company sponsored competitive sports replaced original play. Face book replaced slumber parties. Halloween is now hosted at shopping malls rather than the neighbor's hours next door. Every Child Left Behind, standardized testing and constant comparison, producing chronic anxiety throughout the nation in children, parents and teachers, now routinely imposed in preschool – and a thousand other insidious ways – each of these threaten us, causing us to seek the deeper bonds we don't have. Not finding this fundamental bond with life, with wisdom and innate intelligence we turn to the only bonds we have – the counterfeits culture offers.

So I ask you again, *Bonding to What?*

Bonding to What?

Page 4

Imagine for a moment another imprint, another bond, a bond to innate intelligence and wisdom rather than this culture or that. What you would find, if this were an option, is no self image at all. When challenged, rather than returning to fixed images and beliefs of self and other, we would return to the deep well of intelligence and from that source find a response that is appropriate – now.

Remember, intelligence and wisdom are states of the heart, body and mind, not ideas, images or beliefs. Seeing this clearly one understands that returning to this source requires no image of self, no approval of others. In fact, one can't touch true intelligence if the image is there. The presence of the culture image in the system fundamentally alters the system. One nail drives out another.

On close examination it is plain to see that we are much more that source than the false and limited images culture would have us believe. Seeing that we are not what we think we are is the tipping point. From that moment forward we as adults begin reflecting to our children something entirely different than the cultural mask we have been so comfortable wearing. In that moment the false bond to culture is broken and our true humanity surfaces naturally.

Looking out at the world, at humanity, at the people we love and especially our children from this state, free from cultural images and beliefs, in that moment we and the world are born again and not a moment too soon.

mm