

Bonds ...

Before we start, this isn't a treatise on the relative merits of actors through the years who have been cast in the 007 character. For that, you'll have to go elsewhere.

Nope, this is about another kind of bond – loosely the connection between people, happenings, places and things. As a chemist (way back when), I seem to recall that the main focus was on the two key types, namely ionic and covalent.

And this is where you kind of have to choose – are you an 'ionic' person, in which case it's a give or receive moment – or are you more of your covalent being ... a sharer with your fellow covalenters. I'm sure there are situations that hop between the two extremes, indeed there are academics who have had the dubious pleasure of instilling this knowledge into me that would probably shudder at the fact that I'm not even sure, nor even that fussed to check it out, but so be it. That's not the point I'm getting at here.

I'm all about the choice. To give/receive, or to share. That is the question. Or rather the subject topic I've chosen to meander through.

You see, some relationships are probably quite easily categorised as ionic. That lego brick of connections. Sturdy, unforgiving, true commitment. The sort of thing you have with family, assuming you like them, partners (ditto), and life-long friends. You know where you are with ionic bonds like those. You can leave them to their own devices for ages, but when you find yourself dipping your spoon into the soup of life's chemistry, there they are – intact and as strong as ever.

And then you've got your covalent ones. The whimsical element – a hippy, chilled arrangement – the bond is made, the experience shared, and then you don't have to worry too much about quite which end of the chain the body of the feeling lies. It could be with one person, or the other – neither knows, nor probably cares that much at any one time. Suffice to say it's there, if needed. An ethereal cloud of emotional fuzziness which can be called upon if the occasion arises. Indeed, for all you know, the moment your back's turned, the other end might well decide to purloin some of this covalent resource and use it to good effect elsewhere. As long as they're nifty when you come-a-calling, and have it available for you to engage with and caress, then all is well. Crafty covalent resource management. There's a whole self-help book right there.

But which is the best, we ask? Should I favour one at the expense of another? Can I flip from time to time, or re-arrange in the same way as a t-shirt drawer after a shopping trip (those of you who are still scarred by 2020 will remember this as an outing to a thing called a shop where you actually handled goods before you bought them, as opposed to having them dropped off in an oversized cardboard box emblazoned with an ironic smile logo by a bloke who ultimately became more familiar to you than your own relatives – straight into ionic, no question).

Having given this some thought (the question, not the delivery bloke), I've decided to purloin and forever sully another chemical concept for the purpose of having a framework to hang the argument off. Namely 'orbital theory'.

To me, at least, the ionic kind of emotional entanglement is reserved for the closest relationship circle. They're the ones that naturally (but not necessarily) engage with family and extremely close friends. Clearly, there are situations where the close friends usurp the family – and that's all good. No-one wants to be stuck with rubbish family liaisons at the expense of lifelong friends. Sod that.

The further out you go, the more covalent things become, with those cheeky nebulous bond-thieves out there in the further reaches.

Of course, every now and again you're going to get a zhuzh situation come your way, as an old acquaintance (family or not) comes flying past in some comet-like orbit – briefly touching upon your being in a most ionic fashion before shooting off into the colder recesses of your social circle, to re-join the cheeky nebular gang. You just have to deal with that – problems only really arise, I'm sure, if Zhuzh turns out to be an old flame, and then all bets are probably off with all your bonding, ionic or otherwise.

Good luck with that one, if it ever happens – let me know how it goes – from what I've seen it'll either be a blast or a car crash, but nothing in-between.

Sometimes, as with lots of things to do with energy, the forces wane. Orbits wobble, bodies shift and the interactions aren't as strong as they once were (or indeed others become so). Depending on the prevailing view, there's either some action necessary to sort out the natural order of things, and get them back on track, or potentially there's a need to recognise it for what it is, and go with it, with a view to settling into some new pattern, at some point in the future.

One thing we do know, is that we're all different (thank goodness). Which means we've all got our own outlook on what constitutes a good balance between our ionic and our covalent forces. Star Wars, without the lightsaber and the croissant hair.

And so to the conclusion of this muse on bonding. The accompanying picture to this article is a collage of photographs, taken at St Anne's college by one of their librarians, which show stained glass windows. Each window was designed, and mostly made, by my old chemistry tutor, HSR. When I think back, to a wet, dark, breezy night in December 1983 and my admissions interview in her Bevington Rd garden room office, she did something which set the orbits for the following decades. By opening up the Oxford world, so many bonds were formed. And so many of them ionic. So much was set in motion that evening, and so much since then has been a result of that moment.

Strange to think. I could have been a Zhuzh that day – a 20 minute flash across the HSR orbital plane, and none of the stuff in-between would ever have happened.

Makes you think.....