The Four Connections

How to Flourish by Aligning Your Beliefs, Body, Brain, and Bonds

Book Club Discussion Guide

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Questions for reflection, conversation, and deeper connection

Opening Question

The title of this book is The Four Connections — before we dive in, what is one relationship or connection in your life that you consider truly life-giving, and what do you think makes it so?

Part I: Beliefs

Chapters: Mindsets · Placebos · Awe and Wonder · Prayer · Aging · Mindfulness, Stress, and Resilience · Worry and Overload · Gratitude

1. What ideas on beliefs surprised you the most? Did anything confirm what you already knew or suspected?
2. Think about how your beliefs impact your life. What beliefs do you hold, and how might they be affecting your mental and physical health? Are there any beliefs you might want to change or nourish to boost your well-being? Considering the beliefs that guide your daily life, are you open to information that would alter them?
3. The placebo effect reveals that our beliefs can produce measurable physical change in our bodies. Does that discovery feel empowering to you, unsettling, or both — and why?
4. "The whole world is a series of miracles," says Hans Christian Andersen. Do you agree? Where do you most reliably find miracles and awe — in nature, music, art, worship, or human stories? How often do you intentionally seek it out?
5. How would you define "prayer?" Has your experience of prayer changed over the course of your life? What has deepened, shifted, or surprised you about it?
6. What are your aging beliefs? Are there any that might need some refining, based on what we just explored?
7. How do you manage stress? Do you find yourself lost in chatter very often? What might help you re-direct your thoughts?
8. Resilience is sometimes described not as bouncing back but bouncing forward — emerging from difficulty changed in a meaningful way. Where have you seen that in your own story?

9. What are you grateful for in your life right now? Name as many gifts as possible, both large and small.
10. How can you live a grateful life when facing pain or suffering of any kind?
11. Consider a difficult situation and the impact it had on you. Can you identify an aspect of the situation that you can feel grateful about?

Closing Reflection — Beliefs

✦ ***Is there a person in your life you have never fully thanked — someone whose impact on you deserves to be named? What would it mean to do that before the group meets again?***

Part II: Bodies

Chapters: Breathing Techniques · Pain · Morning Light and Walks · Exercise · Yoga · Diet · Sleep · Nature and Creation

12. When do you become most distracted or anxious during the day? Imagine yourself stopping to take a breath during these moments, letting go of worrisome thoughts, and coming into the here and now. How does that feel?
13. Have you ever noticed your breath becoming shallow or rapid during stress without realizing it? Now that you understand the science behind conscious breathing, how might that awareness change your response in those moments?
14. Which breathing technique would you consider doing regularly? What actions do you do regularly that can be a physical reminder to pause and take a few deep breaths? Describe what that will look like in as much detail as you can.
15. Had you previously understood how significantly our thoughts, beliefs, and emotional state influence our experience of physical pain? How does that knowledge shift the way you might approach pain — in yourself or in others?
16. Have you noticed a difference in your mood or energy on days when you get outside early versus days when you don't?
17. Research consistently shows that movement is one of the most powerful tools we have for mental health. Does knowing that exercise is as much about your brain as your body change your motivation to prioritize it?
18. The gut-brain connection is one of the most fascinating emerging areas of research. Did anything you read about it surprise you or prompt you to reconsider any eating habits?
19. Matthew Walker calls sleep the single most effective thing we can do to reset our brain and body health. Were you already prioritizing sleep, or did this chapter serve as a wake-up call?
20. In what ways do you experience nature? Do you find solace and refreshment there? John Muir said, "In every walk with nature one receives far more than one seeks." Does that resonate with you?

21. Many spiritual traditions describe nature as a primary revelation of the divine. Do you experience creation that way? Has that sense deepened, faded, or changed over the course of your life?

Closing Reflection — Bodies

✦ ***What is one honest change you are willing to make to better care for the body that carries you into every relationship you hold?***

Part III: Brains

Chapters: Distraction, Focus, and Attention · Chatter · The Maturing Brain · Depression and Anxiety · Struggle and Grit · Trauma · Meditation · The Gut-Brain Connection · Laughter · Smell

22. Do you try to accomplish several tasks at once? Do pings and rings impact your focus throughout your day? Would you consider turning off those sounds to minimize these distractions?
23. Are you looking at your phone more often than you would like? Could you put a limit on your screen time so that you could be more present to the real events happening in front of you?
24. Do you get caught up in chatter now and again? Are you worrying about past events or future happenings?
25. How does understanding neuroplasticity — the brain's capacity to rewire itself — change the way you think about learning, habits, or personal growth at any age?
26. Had you previously understood depression and anxiety as whole-body experiences, not simply "mental" ones? How does that shift your compassion — for others and for yourself?
27. What is one small, concrete thing you have discovered that reliably lifts your mood or settles your nervous system when anxiety creeps in?
28. Angela Duckworth describes grit as passion combined with perseverance over the long haul. Where in your life do you see that quality in yourself — perhaps in ways you haven't fully acknowledged?
29. Had you previously understood trauma as something stored in the body, not just the mind? How does that shift the way you think about healing — in yourself or in others?
30. Is there a wound from your past that you now see through a more compassionate or informed lens after reading this chapter?
31. Many people resist meditation because they believe they are "bad at it." Has anything in this chapter shifted that perception for you? Is there a meditative practice you would like to try? What does that look like, and how could you incorporate it into your day?
32. Did you try the savoring practice on p. 159? Share why the experience you were savoring was meaningful to you. Did that bring a bit of joy into your day?
33. The gut is sometimes called our "second brain." Were you surprised to learn how directly our digestive health influences mood, anxiety, and mental clarity?
34. What is one change you might make to nourish both your gut and your mental well-being?

35. Have you ever tried coloring as a mindful activity? If so, do you find it calms you?
36. How do you bring laughter into your life? Do you need to nurture your sense of humor in any way?
37. Is there a scent that holds a special meaning for you? Describe what it is and why it evokes a particular memory for you.
38. Have you ever lost your sense of smell for longer than a few days? Did that loss impact your sense of well-being?

Closing Reflection — Brains

✦ ***Commit to one small practice — a breathing pause, a savoring moment, a screen-free hour — before the group meets again. Come ready to share what it gave you.***

Part IV: Bonds

Chapters: Relationships · Service and Compassion · Ritual · Movement · Singing Together · Kindness and Connections · Body Budgets

39. Do you connect with a friend or loved one every day? Who are the important people in your life right now, who energize you and provide a sense of connection?
40. Where in your daily life do you notice opportunities for deeper connection that you may be passing by?
41. Who is one person you could surprise with a simple "I've been thinking of you" — perhaps someone on your heart that you've been meaning to reach out to?
42. When have you experienced serving others as something that transformed you as much as the person you were serving?
43. Does anything hold you back from acts of service, and how might you gently remove those barriers?
44. What rituals — personal, family, or communal — have most shaped your sense of belonging and identity?
45. Are there rituals you have lost that you grieve, or new ones you feel called to create?
46. Have you ever experienced movement — walking alongside someone, dancing, or even working with your hands together — as a form of connection that words alone couldn't achieve?
47. Is there someone in your life you could invite into a shared movement practice — a walk, a class, a dance — as a way of deepening your bond with them?
48. Have you ever experienced the surprising power of singing or music in a communal setting? What did it open in you?
49. Recall a small, unexpected act of kindness that stayed with you. What made it so memorable?
50. Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett reminds us that every interaction we have either deposits into or withdraws from another person's body budget — meaning our presence is never neutral; it

is either nourishing or depleting at a biological level. Reflect on the relationships in your life: which ones consistently replenish you, and which ones drain you? What might that awareness invite you to do differently?

Closing Reflections — Bonds

✦ ***What is one small but intentional step you will take this week to deepen a connection that matters to you?***

✦ ***Commit to one deliberate act of kindness before the group meets again — and come ready to share what it gave back to you.***

"We are made for one another."

— The Four Connections

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