

BOOK CLUB ACTIVITIES BY CHAPTER

THE ANIMAL IN THE MIRROR: How To Manage Your Anxiety & Find Greater Inner Peace

 **Book Club Zoom Visit:**

I am happy to drop by your book club meeting via zoom.
If you are interested, contact me through my website at www.arniebenn.com.
(I will try to accommodate all requests.)

LEVEL 0: INTRO

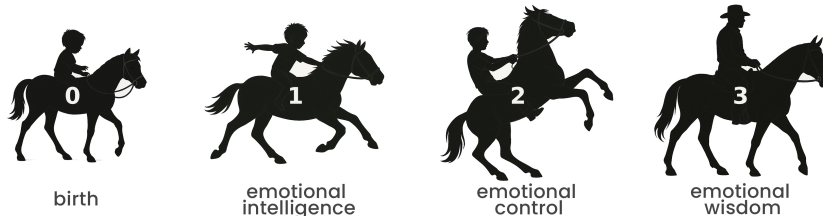
Chapter 00: THE ANIMAL IN THE AUTHOR

Activity 1: Personal Mirror Moment

- Before diving into the book, each member writes down (privately) one behavior or pattern they suspect might be driven more by instinct than conscious choice. Seal it in an envelope to open at the final meeting to see if their self-awareness has evolved.

Activity 2: “Why This Book?” Discussion

- Go around the circle and have each person share what drew them to this book or what they hope to gain from reading it. This creates a baseline for tracking personal growth throughout the book club journey.

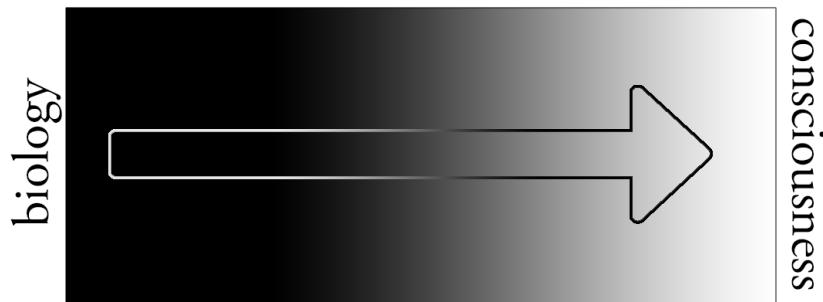


LEVEL 1: ANIMAL

Chapter 01: THE ANIMAL IN THE MIRROR

Activity 1: Mapping Your Spectrum

- Draw the gradient from “biology” to “consciousness” that appears in the book. Have each member place an X where they think they generally operate, on average. (They may also want to put Xs on the spectrum showing their range, from their occasional “low” to their occasional “high.”) Then discuss what would move them (or their range) further right on the spectrum.



Activity 2: Animal Behavior Recognition

- Participants can share one or two recent decisions or reactions. As a group, identify which aspects were “animal” (instinctive, fear-based) and which were “conscious” (deliberate, values-based). Practice doing this non-judgmentally (since we all share the same programming).

Chapter 02: APPLYING THE CONCEPT

Activity 1: The Week-Long Awareness Experiment

- Between meetings, members keep a simple log: Each day, note one moment when you caught yourself reacting instinctively. What triggered it? What did you do? What might a more conscious response have been?

Activity 2: Rider and Horse Visualization

- Lead the group through a brief guided visualization of themselves as the conscious rider on the horse, their body. Ask: “Who is more in control of choosing the direction and speed? What does gaining increasing control look like for you?”

Chapter 03: RESISTING THE CONCEPT

Activity 1: Resistance Inventory

- Have members privately write down one idea from the book that made them uncomfortable or defensive. Then discuss (optionally sharing): “Why might that resistance exist? What

might it be protecting? Is it mirroring any secret self-criticism?"

Activity 2: Ego vs. Growth Exercise

- Present a controversial statement from the book. Have members argue BOTH sides - first defending their instinctive reaction, then arguing against it. The goal is to better distinguish between ego-defense and legitimate disagreement.

LEVEL 2: HUMAN

Chapter 04: HAPPINESS, DEPRESSION & SUBSTANCE (AB)USE

Activity 1: Pleasure vs. Happiness Audit

- Create two columns: "Things that bring me pleasure" and "Things that bring me happiness." Discuss the difference and whether the group can identify which list is driven by the animal seeking relief versus consciousness seeking fulfillment.

Activity 2: Mood Pattern Tracking

- For one week, members note their emotional low points and what they reached for (food, scrolling, substance, distraction). Discuss: "What was the animal trying to soothe?" and "What are practical (or our preferred) ways to better manage our reactions?"

Chapter 05: PSYCHOLOGY & ACCOUNTABILITY

Activity 1: Nature, Nurture, and Choice Triangle

- For a specific behavior pattern, have members draw a triangle with three points: Biology (nature), Environment (nurture), and Conscious Choice. Plot where we think our pattern falls. Discuss how much control we actually have.

Activity 2: Reframing Exercise

- Each person shares a psychological label they've given themselves or received (anxious, depressed, ADHD, etc.). Practice reframing: Instead of "I am [label]," try "My animal responds to threats with [symptoms] and I'm gradually learning to better manage that response."

Chapter 06: Religion & Spirituality

Activity 1: Fear vs. Love Spectrum

- Have members reflect on their religious or spiritual practice (if any): "What percentage is motivated by fear (punishment, judgment, conformity) versus love/growth/connection?" Map it on a simple scale, along with where they aspire to be on that map. No judgment — just awareness. Discuss: What gets us closer to where we aspire to be?

Activity 2: Spiritual Practice Experiment

- Each member tries one spiritual practice (meditation, prayer, nature walk, breathwork), something that focuses specifically on enhancing consciousness rather than on appeasing the animal's fear or satisfying a theological expectation. Report back on the experience.

Chapter 07: SEXUALITY

Activity 1: Biology vs. Values Reflection

- Private journaling prompt (not shared unless desired¹): “In my sexual/romantic life, where do my animal drives conflict with my conscious values? Where are they aligned?” Discuss general themes without personal disclosure.

Activity 2: Cultural Messaging Analysis

- Bring examples of media messages about sexuality and relationships. As a group, identify which messages appeal to our animal instincts versus supporting conscious partnership.

Chapter 08: RELATIONSHIPS & MARRIAGE

Activity 1: Chemistry vs. Compatibility Chart

- For current or past significant relationships, members privately rate (1-10) the initial “chemistry” versus long-term “compatibility.” They may also rate how much they idealized their partner and the relationship at the beginning versus the truth of normal, human reality? Discuss the patterns and what sustains relationships when chemistry fades.

Activity 2: Conscious Conflict Role-Play

- Have two volunteers role-play a common relationship conflict twice: First, both responding from their “animal” (which is defensive and reactive). Second, both responding from their higher “consciousness” (which is curious and values-based). Discuss what changed.

Chapter 09: MONEY

Activity 1: Resource vs. Status Spending

- Members review their last month of expenses and categorize purchases: Survival/Security needs, Status signaling, or Conscious values alignment. What percentage falls into each category?

Activity 2: “Enough” Exercise

- Each person defines their personal “enough” — the amount of money/possessions that would genuinely meet their needs. Discuss how far this is from what the animal wants to hoard in order to feel safe.

¹ No pun intended.

Chapter 10: POLITICS

Activity 1: Political Animal Recognition

- Discuss whether you agree that compassion, non-judgement, and resistance are the “trriage” of the Left, while order, security, and tradition are the triage of the Right. Have members identify at least one but preferably two political values that they actually share with the other side (even if they disagree about most political issues).

Activity 2: Steel Man Exercise

- Each person must present the strongest possible argument for the political position they personally disagree with the most. This builds the consciousness muscle of seeing truth on “the other side.”

Activity 3: Debate Towards The Center

- Discuss the approach to compromise suggested in the book, in which we “debate towards the center,” motivated by mutual understanding, mutual respect, and a desire for compromise. Make a list of two or three issues on which you would have a difficult time compromising, and then list how far you would compromise on each (if you were assured it would truly lead to peace).

Chapter 11: SCIENCE

Activity 1: Belief Audit

- List scientific claims members have accepted without personally verifying them (or being able to verify them). Discuss: “How much of this is trust in the scientific process versus tribalistic belief? Where might we be scientifically dogmatic?”

Activity 2: Bias Recognition

- Bring examples of scientific studies, on politically charged topics (like climate, vaccines, GMOs, stem cells), that have scientists on both sides of the issue. Practice identifying where bias might exist in research, funding, interpretation, or as a result of *revenue*, and discuss how we might identify real scientific truth if we are not conversant in science ourselves.

Activity 3: Scientific Inspiration

- Bring examples of incredible new scientific discoveries or new technologies, ones that are intuitive to understand and fascinating to share.

Chapter 12: ANIMALS

Activity 1: Mirror Test Reflection

- Watch videos of animals displaying emotion, intelligence, or self-awareness. Discuss: “What changes when we recognize they have inner lives like ours? How does this affect our choices about food, products, entertainment?”

Activity 2: One-Week Conscious Consumer Challenge

- Members commit to one week of making animal-conscious choices (research food sources, avoid certain products, etc.). Share what was easy, hard, and what they learned.

LEVEL 3: BEING

Chapter 13: CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION: 3 APPROACHES

Activity 1: Choose Your Path

- Review the three approaches to conscious evolution presented in the chapter. Have each member identify which approach resonates most and create a personal 30-day experiment to practice it.

Activity 2: Evolution Progress Check

- Using the horse-and-rider metaphor, have members assess: “In what area of my life has my rider gotten stronger? Where is my horse still running wild? What’s my next step?”

Chapter 14: CONSCIOUSNESS PERSPECTIVE — PART 1

Activity 1: Observer Exercise

- Lead a brief meditation where members practice observing their thoughts and emotions without identifying with them. Discuss: “What’s it like to be both the animal having feelings AND the consciousness watching?”

Activity 2: Consciousness Definition

- In small groups, members craft their own definition of consciousness based on their experience and the book. Share and discuss the different perspectives.

Chapter 15: CONSCIOUSNESS PERSPECTIVE — PART 2

Activity 1: Meditation Style

- Lead a brief meditation where members practice thinking about a specific idea, concept, or issue. Then, lead a second brief meditation where members practice emptying their mind of thought and just be-ing in the moment. Discuss the difference between the two experiences.

Activity 2: Altered State Discussion

- Members share (only if comfortable) any experiences of heightened consciousness or awareness — meditation, flow state, peak experience, etc. What was different about perception in those moments?

Activity 3: Meaning-Making Reflection

- Discuss: “If consciousness creates meaning from meaningless noise, what meaning have I been creating? Is it serving me? What new meanings might I consciously choose? To what extent can we manage or choose the perspective we *want* to have?”

Chapter 16: PURPOSE & BEING

Activity 1: Animal Purpose vs. Conscious Purpose

- Create two columns: “What my animal wants” (survival, status, pleasure, security) and “What my consciousness values” (meaning, growth, connection, contribution). Where do they conflict? Where can they cooperate?

Activity 2: Integration Visualization

- Envision your ideal life with animal, human, and being fully integrated. What does it look like? What does a typical day include? What would need to change to move toward that vision?

Activity 3: Developing Our Perspective

- Describe or write down the “big picture perspective” that, for you, serves as the backdrop and context for your life and thinking. Next, try to get even more detailed about the specifics — by using imagination, belief, philosophy, or even research (if possible), to create the most robust perspective you can manage.

Activity 4: Giving Love

- Consider the author’s idea that every human consciousness is simply another aspect (or perspective) belonging to All-Consciousness — that all “souls” are “consciousness sparks” of Divinity itself. In this way, we are all intimately connected to each other and to the Source of life (whatever that might Be). We are all “God, experiencing.” Discuss ways we might apply this idea in our lives in order to improve our own experience, as well as that of those around us? Is this, in fact, the way to “love your neighbor as yourself?”

Final Meeting Activities

Closing Reflection Circle

Activity 1: BEFORE AND AFTER

- Open the sealed envelopes from the first meeting. Have members share how their self-awareness has evolved. What can they see now that they couldn’t see before?

Activity 2: COMMITMENT TO CONSCIOUSNESS

- Each member shares one specific practice or change they commit to continuing after the book club ends. The group witnesses and supports these commitments without judgment.

Activity 3: GRATITUDE ROUND

- Close with appreciation: “What insight from this book (or this group) will stay with you? What are you grateful for from this journey?”

Optional Ongoing Group Activities

Monthly Check-In**

- For groups that want to continue, schedule quarterly “consciousness check-ins” to support each other’s ongoing evolution, and share successes and struggles.

Consciousness Book Club**

- Continue as a group focused on conscious evolution, reading other books on psychology, spirituality, philosophy, or personal growth.

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CONNECT

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