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BOOK REVIEW

DOI: 10.7595/management.fon.2020.0008

Abstract:

Book review of: *Living with the Monks* by Jesse Itzler. New York: Center street, 2018. 304 pp ISBN 978-1478993421 (hardback)

For those who are unfamiliar with the name, Jesse Itzler is a businessman, ultra-marathon runner, ex-recording artist who produced arena songs for professional sports teams, the founder of Marquis Jet and Zico coconut water among others and part-owner of the NBA's Atlanta Hawks. The ladies who are reading this might not care about none of those things but might be further intrigued by the fact that he is the husband of self-made billionaire and founder of Spanx, Sara Blakely, who he often talks about throughout his writing. It goes without saying that you can learn a lot from self-made millionaires and billionaires just by listening to one of their interviews alone or by reading through their bios online, but it is even better when you can read a book they wrote based on their own unusual and unconventional experiences (even if it is not a business book). That is where "Living with the Monks" jumps in.

"Living with the Monks" is Jesse Itzler's 2nd book, following his wildly popular and successful "Living with a SEAL" (which is, hands down, one of my favourites). "Living with a SEAL" follows Jesse's life as he is trained by arguably the toughest Navy SEAL of all time (David Goggins). It is raw, honest and teaches valuable life lessons and discipline through struggle. As you can probably imagine, "Living with the Monks" is on the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of intensity but is just as honest and successful at delivering valuable life lessons.

The book focuses on self-awareness, failure, change, dealing with distractions, but most of all, happiness and our relationship with time. Without going into too many details, some of my favourite lessons and key takeaways from the book are:

- "Most of our goals get shattered because we don't block out the noise."
- "Decide that you want it more than you're afraid of it."
- "Failure is tied to not trying, it has nothing to do with the outcome."
- "Effort is the true source of pride. Not results."

"Living with the Monks" is full of great quotes like these that are bound to make you think. I advise you to take a pen and paper out, because you will be taking a lot of notes. However, despite what you may believe after reading the above quotes, I would not classify this as a self-help book at all. How Jesse gets to these thoughts and quotes is what is interesting. It is more of a personal, confession-like story where you get to choose whether you want to draw valuable conclusions from it or not. If not, you can just enjoy the ride.

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What I particularly like about it is the writing style. Jesse's writing is honest, easily digestible and often quite funny. He does not try to sound too poetic or come off as a mystery novel writer, he just keeps it really simple. You are probably not going to devour the book in one sitting, but it is likely that you will finish it very quick. It is entertaining and educational at the same time, which makes you want to continue reading asap. You get a very natural and human feel from it, as if you were reading a memoir of a friend you know really well. If you strongly dislike occasional bad language or cussing, you might not like his style, but for me it was refreshing and satisfying to realize that a person of his stature is actually quite normal and grounded. It makes everything more relatable.

What is also interesting about this book is that the story is not linear. As a reader, you often jump back in time to experience a flashback or to catch up with another storyline that has been going on in parallel. If you find that to be distracting or if you strictly prefer for the writer to "stick to the point and not beat around the bush", this book might not be your cup of tea. Funny enough, Jesse is very much aware of this and addresses it when talking with his editor, questioning whether there is enough material for a book in the first place. Personally, I did not mind the non-linear storytelling, but I would definitely argue that "Living with a SEAL" is much more stable and linear.

All of the above was just a general overview or perhaps even vague, so let's get a bit more specific (but without spoiling anything). Early on in the book, Jesse realizes that he is somewhat on autopilot and a bit overwhelmed with his repetitive and work-centric daily life (aren't we all?). As per his usual self, he starts looking for ways to shake things up. After all, stepping out of his routine is how he became an ultra-marathon runner or invited a Navy SEAL to live with him for a month, in the first place. That is how and why the idea of living in a monastery starts to slowly creep into his mind.

We get to know the author, his background and his lifestyle throughout the first few chapters. We get to experience some of his previous extreme endeavours, while the idea of living in a monastery grows and starts to occupy his thoughts. He deliberates whether leaving his wife and four kids for such an experiment is worthwhile but decides to go through with it anyway. As the day approaches, he gets more and more excited, only to have that excitement be stripped away and replaced by confusion and a bit of anxiety once he finally arrives at the monastery. It turns out that it is not what he had in mind...

Almost instantly, he starts questioning his readiness to go through with the experiment and whether he is doing the right thing in the first place. He starts thinking too far ahead to his last scheduled day at the monastery, instead of being present. On arrival, Jesse experiences a bit of a cultural shock and sensory overload and through that it is when we first start to examine our relationship with time and the fact that it is likely out of balance.

Unfamiliar surroundings, the differences between the monks, as well as many of their habits and choices leave him baffled in perpetuity. The lack of cell phone reception, being away from family and having to adjust or change his routines make him restless. As a passionate runner, he does manage to find solace in looking forward to his free time, knowing he will engage in some form of physical activity. As such, he is eager to finally be allowed into the monastery's training centre and attend one of the famed training sessions, not knowing he is in for another surprise... Be that as it may, Jesse still finds a way to learn something new, despite unforeseen circumstances. He passes it all on to the reader and that is where the true value of "Living with the Monks" lies.

Throughout this whole experiment, it is interesting to follow the development of Jesse's thought process - from shock, over disappointment and tension, to slowly quieting his mind, embracing the situation he is in and re-learning to appreciate the little things. He analyses his preconceived notions; he lets go of expectations and learns how to control his thoughts and deal with distractions. In a way, he starts becoming a part of the team after a while and gets to partake in a couple of unique social activities outside of the monastery as well.

Towards the end of his stay, he even starts feeling a little sombre that it is time to leave. He re-enters his old world, equipped with a heightened sense of awareness and pent-up excitement to get back to his family. In the end, we get to see how living with the monks has affected his behaviour, emotions and overall outlook on life. Jesse reintegrates into society and picks up where he left off, presumably a little calmer, wiser and at peace.

Finally, I would suggest that you read both "Living with the Monks" and "Living with a SEAL". It is not absolutely necessary, but I do recommend it. If I were you, I'd read the latter first, simply because it happened

prior to and partially inspired the monastic experiment. However, if you are still not convinced, consider listening to episode #1127 of the Joe Rogan Experience podcast (Jesse Itzler is the guest). You can also find it on [Youtube](#). Both books and much, much more is discussed throughout the interview, after which you will definitely know whether something like this piques your interest or not.

I hope you find this book review useful, thank you for reading through it and good luck!

Suggested further readings and next steps:

- Joe Rogan Experience #1127 with Jesse Itzler
- Jesse Itzler - "Living with a SEAL"
- Jesse Itzler - "Living with the Monks"
- Joe Rogan Experience #1080 with David Goggins
- Joe Rogan Experience #1212 with David Goggins (2nd guest appearance)
- David Goggins - "Can't hurt me"

Accepted: 2020-04-18



About the Author

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Ivan Devedzic is an IPMA certified Project Manager, composer and digital nomad. He has worked for a Y-Combinator backed, Silicon Valley start-up for almost 3 years, managing 10 cross-functional, remote teams of specialists from all over the world. During his tenure, he has worn multiple hats, but the majority of his work has revolved around creative project management. He has more than 750 successfully delivered projects under his belt.

Ivan graduated from 4 music schools, most recently from a certificate course at Musicians Institute - College of Contemporary Music in Los Angeles, where he lived for a year in 2017/18. It is around that time that he first started travelling while working remotely. He lived in 4 countries (on 3 continents) and has travelled to almost 50. His most recent stint was a 14-month long journey across Central America and South America, which involved diving throughout the Caribbean, hiking up dozens of volcanoes and much, much more.

Ivan is a passionate storyteller and is frequently involved in developing compelling narratives, solutions, audio and visuals. As a co-founder of 2 former start-ups, he is no stranger to entrepreneurship either and is currently focusing on personal projects, mentoring and public speaking. He obtained his BSc and MSc degrees at the University of Belgrade, where he recently taught his first class, as a guest lecturer. Ivan is a big NBA fan, he is passionate about fitness and is obsessed with growth and reaching his full potential. For book recommendations, business inquiries or just to chat, feel free to [connect with him on LinkedIn](#) or send him an e-mail at idevedzic@gmail.com.