

Anyone for coffee? As Natimuk's newest cafe entrepreneur Simey was the obvious choice to review the latest book from American author Arno Ilgner - *Espresso Lessons*. A book about coffee?? By a climber? Alas, Simey is too busy in pursuit of the ultimate 'decaf mocha latte' so he hand-balled the book and the review onto me.

1st lesson:

Don't judge a book by its cover. Ok, so the title says 'coffee' all over it and there's even a picture on the front of a bloke offering you a slurp from his thermos flask. But it's not about coffee. It's actually about climbing. There is a passing mention inside of how he tenuously came to a link between the two but you'd be best not to wonder why.

The good news is.... it's a good book. If you're into your climbing and you're interested in what motivates you and what holds you back it's actually a really good book. *Espresso Lessons* is a distillation (and there in lies that tenuous coffee link - he could have as easily called it 'Tales from the Whiskey Jug') of Arno's earlier book *The Rock Warrior's Way*.

The basis of both books is one of 'mental fitness'. Nothing new in itself, mental training has been a popularised discipline for decades. But what sets this apart from a great deal of the literature on mental training is the paradoxical leap that, in fact, the training we need is to help us "get out of our minds, for the mind tends to limit us by its tendency and desire to avoid stress". The implications of what is described here are, I reckon, rather profound.

The sort of mental training we may be more familiar with focuses often on changing what we think; to think positively, to think strong, to rehearse success. What Arno alludes to is that the problem is the thinking itself or at least our relationship with those thoughts. Countless 'day-time-TV' 'positive-thinking-coaches' have been telling us for years to use those voices in our heads to convince ourselves how great we are. Here we discover that those voices are just our thoughts and our thoughts are just the product of our thinking mind. And as it's our thinking mind that consistently sabotages our efforts when things get 'stressful' (as they tend to when it gets hard and/or scary) it is understanding the relationship with your thinking mind that underpins your success. Did I mention that this is potentially quite profound?!

It's much less 'Anthony Robbins' and much more 'Dalai Lama'. *Espresso Lessons* uses 'fear' as a perfect example of how this thinking mind relationship pans out: "Fear is about what might happen, not what is happening. And what might happen originates not from the situation, but from the thinking mind".

What this book does is set you on a very interesting journey of looking intently at your climbing experiences. It starts with observing yourself and your mind with a goal of finding a place more about 'awareness' than thinking. It then guides you through the experience of climbing from this subtle shift in perspective. "Understanding the difference between thinking and awareness is the foundation step to increasing mental fitness".

There's a lot of information in here and it can be a bit overwhelming to take it all in. It's not a book to gulp down in one sitting, I'd recommend a 'snacking' approach with plenty of time to digest.

If you have a staunch aversion to what is already sounding like 'airy fairy hippy shit' then don't be put off, there's lots of very practical stuff in here too. A whole section on falling for example - how to break it down into useful and palatable learning progressions; how to assess fall consequences on routes and tips to reduce the paralysis that afflicts so many of us mid crux as we leave the reassuring security of our gear.

OK, so the books illustrations are for the want of a more eloquent description....a bit rubbish. But I don't imagine it's easy coming up with diagrams for this sort of stuff. There's a few too many acronyms for my liking, I find them all too confusing to handle. I'd also like to see more inspirational photos, the black and white is too dark and too...black and white. All being said I think it's a great book.

Maybe you honestly believe that the only thing holding you back in your climbing is your poor show in the 'one-arm-lock-off' competitions and I don't question working on them can help. But some of this stuff, I'd wager, has the potential to make a bigger difference. It's not an easy read. Some of it may even be a bit difficult to 'hear' because it asks you to challenge the role of your mind and your thinking. But it is training after-all and since when was training easy?

I'd highly recommend *Espresso Lessons* to anyone interested in pushing their current level of climbing and exploring their relationship with that "most interesting space" we find ourselves in when we climb.

--Duncan MacGregor, Natimuk, Australia