



CHAPTER ONE: APPRENTICESHIP

CHANGES THE POINT

A DEEPER FITNESS
CONVERSATION



*To those interested
in a deeper
conversation...*

This is the: **CHANGE IS THE POINT** Zine.
The intent is to share thought provoking
articles on training, psychology,
philosophy and change to inspire a
deeper conversation about fitness.

This first *Chapter* features articles from
The Apprenticeship; an epoch of my life
characterised by a four week coaching
intensive in Salt Lake City, America .

This period shaped my philosophy on
fitness: that it is more than just sets
and reps, programs and macros, but
that fitness is your ability **to change.**

This practice goes beyond the gym;
fitness is who you are, how you show
up, how well you manage your emotions
and yourself. Hopefully this Chapter
illuminates that.

*Serge Houblias
Chapter One
August 26'*

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FOREWARD

The Apprenticeship began in July 2023. I flew to Salt Lake City, America and spent four weeks in *The Space* – the name of my Mentor's gym. I'd been following *nonprophet* for over a year after a friend had mentioned that I might resonate with the deeper fitness message.

At the time of *The Apprenticeship*, I didn't understand much of what I experienced. But I have since spent months and years decoding and deciphering; then practicing and applying what I have come to learn.

The writings herein reflect a process not a product; a reminder of what and where I've come from, and as a reminder that there is no arrival. Only a commitment to the work, and a commitment to change.

They have been ordered in narrative sequence – mostly chronological but not always – so that the *Chapter* reads more as a continually expanding conversation, with each revelation building on the last.

Some articles have been updated and revised as my own views and beliefs have changed – as they should, because that is the point – while others have been kept as they were for authenticity's sake.



APPRENTICESHIP APPLICATION

I've thought a lot about this question. Such is my inclination. I have often been told that I overthink. And to a degree, I do. Although, I am surrounded by those who under think and have learned to become less concerned with their opinions. Alas, after many hours of deliberation, I have arrived at this, attempting to get out of my own way to answer this truthfully...

The rock I am perched on is jagged and course. It is uncomfortable and awkward. It is unlike the chairs I have all too commonly taken for granted, shaped with intention, to mirror the human form. The rock however, has no regard for my delicate posture. I must respect this.

The rock overlooks a valley. It reminds me of a fishbowl with the trees and the dirt and the mountains engulfing me. I am completely alone. I know there are other questers somewhere in the valley below, but we have had no contact for over 72 hours.

I am fasted; food affects clarity, or so I am told. I have only rations of water to sustain me. This is by choice. I have embarked on this quest to figure out what I should do. Or perhaps, that some divine impulse would guide me to it.

I look up to the clouds beginning to form. They are ominous shades of grey. They threaten to implode violently just as they had done the night prior. It was a harrowing experience; the rain, the thunder, and the lightning thrashed the landscape unrelentingly; with only a thin blue tarp separating me from the chaos. Alas, my cries for help rang out unheard, lost amidst an indifferent deluge. I had not anticipated my search for answers would take me to these depths.

I adjust my seating position against the rock, needing to do so every few minutes so that it remains bearable. The clouds overhead finally break apart and rain splashes against my bear skin – completely alone, clothes are optional. After a week in the wilderness, the rain is a welcome shower.

Peering upward, I begin to plead for the umpteenth time. It is the same prayer I have offered before: "Help me. Please... Guide me. Show me. Tell me what I need to do".

Suddenly, something shatters within me. It comes cascading down my cheeks in a myriad of sobs. If this is my answer, it arrives in an unexpected and cryptic fashion.

Words appear on my lips: "I don't know", I mumble. These are meek and indecisive; the sort of vocabulary I have staved off my whole life. And yet, sitting on a lone rock in the middle of the wilderness, they are more true than anything I have ever said.

"I don't know", I begin to chorus again, as the words take on an energy and power of their own. I'm screaming it now, with no-one but the trees and the dirt and the mountains to heed witness. This episode continues for some time. It is cathartic and I feel lighter and resolute. It concludes with a statement: "I am", and for the first time, this feels enough.

This experience was powerful for many reasons; least of which were some of these profound insights. Prior to embarking, I had expectations that all would be made clear; everything answered; and that my life path would appear before me.

But I did not receive what I expected. Only so much more... I had come searching for what to do, and instead, I had come away with a richer understanding of who I was.

The question itself: *"Who you need to become in order to do what you want to do?"* is perplexing. I have sat for many hours at my laptop attempting to find the words to articulate my response appropriately. Thus far, it has been futile. Perhaps in sharing the above account, the answer may become apparent.

"What do I want to do?". Some years ago, it become brutally evident to me, that this was the wrong question. What I do is irrelevant. It doesn't matter. But "Who am I?" and "Who do I need to become?" ... These are better questions.

The cursor on my laptop screen blinks, waiting expectantly for my feedback. I fail to find words. "I don't know?". Perhaps this is most fitting? That the person I need to become is someone who is comfortable not knowing? It has been before. Ultimately what I do is an extension of who I am. And uncovering that is a lifelong(s?) process.

As coaches, we identify as problem solvers; self-assessment analysts even. We may pride ourselves on our ability to recognise our own bullshit. We practice with self-knowledge as the intent. We are curious. Truth seekers. And maybe this is all a facade. We package and sell our coaching as a service. But in truth, we are trying to figure out who we are.

This process represents an opportunity to do that. As does every potential client I am interested in working with. As does the Vision Quest of the account above.

The person I need to become is who I am – curious – as that is the way I may find, or loose my-self. It is this search for self that sustains me; inspires me. It is why I do what I do. And why I will continue to do so.

APPRENTICESHIP APPLICATION

PROLOGUE: THE RETURN



Only psychopaths are awake at this hour.

Barely conscious, I lay gazing upward into the early morning abyss. Eventually, my eyes adjust to the blackness and I will myself from the comfort of the bed sheets.

Methodically, I move around the dark unit, careful not to make noise. For any sound is amplified dramatically in the morning stillness. I gather my belongings strewn across the floor and sneak through the door.

The air, unlike mid-summer in the Salt Lake Valley, is cold and harsh. As always, I look to the stars to feel a little less crabby, as I make towards the

1997 Nissan Elgrand illuminated by the dull flickering street lights.

The old van warms slowly over the half hour commute. The gentle hum of the engine allows my brain time to acclimate softly with the radio kept stilled. Today I am excited to return to the familiar. And underwhelmed at the normality.

Arriving, the gym is lifeless and stony and within minutes, the early risers come shuffling through the doors. They resemble the *Walking Dead*: eyes glazed, postures stooped, movements sluggish. The creak of joints is audible, joined by the groans that escape those who lounge over foam rollers.

Fourteen have shown for the 5:15am CrossFit class. I converse with a few, before the topic of *The Apprenticeship* inevitably arrives. I mutter something about “a valuable learning experience” and quickly bring the conversation to a close.

I am unable to clarify my own thoughts on the events of the last four weeks I realise. Pushing this aside, I launch into my brief, optimistic that these would arrive shortly hereafter. They don’t.

Not for another 18 months.



*I'm never as graceful
during a transition as
I would like to be*

Then I'm reminded

*Graceful is not the
point*

Change is

THE START

Expectation is lazy
Assumption made to survive.
When it is not met
You realise how futile it is.
You chastise yourself for believing
Delve deep within your psyche.
Then recognise that the fault
Was all yours.
You offloaded responsibility
And tethered yourself to that
When the other had no intent to oblige.
Expectation is not formalised
Manifestation of imagination.
You look from the outside
Crafting lavish stories
Building the tower of expectation high.
A mirror is held
It reflects your own ignorance.
Expectation is lazy
It has no intent to oblige.
Best guesses
Not certainties.
Others are distracted
Unmotivated. Selfish. Petty.
Why place the weight of expectation
On ephemeral human kind.
I live with my faith
Built my expectation
Lucky in the past
To have it met more times than not.

This time is crushing.
For these held in high regard
Were a lifeboat in a sea
Filled of bad incentives
And the homogenised alive.
Now I turn to realise
I am in this lifeboat alone.
And all along I expected
They were there by my side.
But now they fade, sinking
To the depths below the tide.
Along with them my faith
Beliefs and stories too.
Expectation leaving me.
And I am alone again.
As I was at The Start.



INTRODUCTION

My presence as I enter the classroom is barely acknowledged.

The students continue their private conversations with backs turned to the stranger, not bothering to hush their voices. Some slouch in chairs tilted on two legs, testing to see how aggressive an incline they can manage before losing balance; the loud thud of body against wall indicates this has been achieved. Another group has started a war and are hurling pages of debris at one another; their work books lay emaciated, growing ever thinner with each reload.

I weave my way through the sea of premature hormones, assume my most confident posture at the helm of the room. No one takes notice. I am, after all, merely a substitute. And the students have been conditioned to expect a blissful reprieve from the drudgery and strict standards expected by their regular teachers. Regardless, they'll settle eventually – so my lecturers told me at University.

Leaving the notional position of authority, I begin restlessly pacing the room while glaring at the more destructive renegades.

I hope that this penetrating stare alone forces their compliance. The perpetrators only meet my eyes for a second before returning to their roles in the anarchic orchestra. A handful of choice words surface in my mind; “disrespectful”, “rude”, “arrogant” and “entitled” amongst them. But these labels will have no effect on their intended targets anyway.

I recruit the next weapon in my arsenal – my voice – opting for civil discourse and asking politely for the cohort's attention. It does not come.

I try a second and third time, each attempt louder and a little less polite than the last until my vocal chords strain with the effort. Only to be drowned out in the cacophony of other noises.

The disarray in the classroom multiplies and with it, my frustration and angst. Even the polite, reliable students are joining the rebellion. Despite my attempts to remain calm and measured, I am losing control. Not that I ever had it in the first place.

My physiology reacts: a quickening of the pulse and a shortening of breath, panic setting in. The adolescents sense this, feeding off it. The clock tells me that 52 minutes remain until the symphonic toll of the school bell saves me.

Standing in front of the rambunctious class, I am desperately out of place. Unable to change the unfurling chaos, I am forced to change myself...





THE SPACE

Michael – The Mentor – describes *The Space* as “the green building across the road from the strip club”. There isn’t anything particularly special about it; just a dull cement block in downtown Salt Lake City.

A vacant lot next door is frequented by the homeless – the unofficial waste collection department – who hoard the discarded belongings and trash of the city’s visitors. It’s an underwhelming facade.

Inside however, it is different.

The Space emits a cold and icy aura. The black rubber flooring contrasts starkly the pale white walls. Ergs, weights and various pieces of gym equipment are tucked away into concealed corners, leaving a vast empty void in the middle of the room; the exception, a row of assault bikes lying poised to the side, awaiting earnestly their next victim.

A modest pull-up rig – consistent with the black and white colour scheme – is pushed against a wall. There are few barbells; they sit hidden behind the white board where six workouts have been scribed, Monday through to Saturday. They read more like art than science.

Everything is clean and spotless, like a freshly shined mirror. Almost as if by design...

THE CUP

Empty it.

*It's as simple as that.
Why is what you know,
So important to you anyway?*

*You started for change
And now the chance is here,
Yet you cling to your beliefs.*

*They only hold you back.
Again, here's your chance,
To empty what you know.*

*For a cup that is full,
Leaves no room for you to grow.*

*You don't like what others do,
Condemn them and their practice,
While elevating the status of yours.*

Who do you think you are?

CHANGE IS THE POINT.

*It's meant to be hard.
For nothing worth doing,
Was ever a walk in the park.*

Empty.

Empty.

Empty.

Pour it all away.

*You'll only reach clarity,
Because you risked losing all.*

*You are still young,
And have much to learn.*

But The Universe is old.

It ebbs and it flows.

*Yet here you are again,
Living with your beliefs,
Permanently set in stone.*

Chaos is not bad.

*Only to your rigidity.
For in this dwells opportunity,*

For everything.

It starts with one action.

*It is as simple as that.
So what will you do now?*

Empty the cup.

Or let the liquid go stagnant.



CHAPTER ONE: THE SPACE ODYSSEY



I asked Michael at The Apprenticeship's close how I could best leverage the experience. He told me "Do good work". I started this piece to honour that.

I learned to learn from my mother; a librarian with a love of books. She taught me that learning was a process of acquiring; of reading and memorising; and internalising the wisdom of others so that it becomes our own.

Years of schooling and a University Degree in Education reinforced these notions. And by all accounts, I was extremely well learned. So I thought. Up until *The Apprenticeship*.

I've always had an affinity for the intellectual. I was drawn to Mark Twight and Michael Blevins from (what used to be) *nonprophet* for this reason. They were articulate and insightful, and had a perspective on training that was deeper and more nuanced than any I'd been exposed to in the fitness industry thus far.

I thought that by investing in *The Apprenticeship* I'd learn to be just as sophisticated and successful. And that I would finally possess the *thing* I felt they had, and that clearly I did not.

Often, I described learning in these terms: as a *thing* I could take or get, possess or acquire. And in doing so, I'd been missing the point.

"You came in here being very eager to start learning" Michael tells me at *The Apprenticeship's* conclusion... "But you did the equivalent of banging your head against the door to open it as opposed to just waiting to push it with your hand".

If I'd been less concerned with what I could get or take from *The Apprenticeship*, and more with how I could harmonise with where I was and best fit in, I would have paradoxically gotten – or learned a lot more.

After four weeks in Salt Lake City, I'd returned home with only a *nonprophet* branded hacky sack to show. It seemed I'd been ripped off and joined a cult. But if I had been ripped off, and if I had joined a cult, *nonprophet* should have given me exactly what I'd come to get: a special *thing*.

Cultists maintain that such *things* exist: the sole connection to a higher power, or a secret only the initiated have access too. I should have paid closer attention to Mark and Michael on the *nonprophet* podcast as they repeated many times over that such a *thing* does not exist; and the *thing* that everyone thought was magic – the fabled *300 Training Program* – was on its own, mostly useless.

My education taught me to value these *things*. It taught me that these *things* are the things that make us educated, and that learning and acquiring them was in my best interest if I hoped to be successful and productive. Pursuing these *things* however, led me on an endless search; from the magic pills to the quick fixes; the products and courses that promised to cure my ignorance and mediocrity, and bestow some semblance of satisfaction by giving me what I was lacking.

Learning like this didn't make me more autonomous, only made me more dependant. I went from one *thing* (a smarter expert), to the next *thing* (the latest product), to the next (another course) as I was told – and sold – that the answers to my questions would be found outside myself – in *things* – , rather than within.

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime", goes the old adage. This was clearly not the case in my current paradigm.

I pay closer attention to stories now and the way people share their experiences. I'm more interested in those narrated in first person, evidently rooted in lived experience. It's proved a decent barometer for one who has actually learned as opposed to someone who has just read and acquired a lot.

Nietzsche described this – someone who has earned what they have learned through their own lived experience – as "he who writes in blood".

Rather than just knowing things – because you have heard or read them – learning is becoming what you learn and embodying it; someone who has learned *is* what they have learned.

A caterpillar enters a cocoon and emerges as a butterfly; a snake outgrows and sheds its skin; a tadpole sprouts arms and legs and becomes a frog. These are demonstrations of learning in nature, as each physically transforms and changes what they are.

The environment dictates these transformations. It makes learning inevitable. The gym in Salt Lake City serves as such. It provides the opportunity for growth and exploration; and stability and nourishment, both of which are necessary to transform – for too much novelty leads to burn out, and too little risk to stagnation.

Skilled coaches and teachers can change the environment to suit the needs of the learner. Just as Michael had done for me during *The Apprenticeship*. It was unpleasant, and uncomfortable. And it forced a confrontation with the mirror; which was ultimately what I needed to do to learn.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SPACE ODYSSEY

I used to expect learning to arrive in flashes and “A-ha” moments. But much of what I’ve come to understand about *The Apprenticeship* has taken months to unpack. Because learning takes time and it takes patience. And it requires an undeniable commitment to each lesson.

I started this article as soon as I left America, blissfully unaware of the painstaking journey I was about to undergo in writing it. But this represents my learning – is evidence of it – so I had to see it through to the end.

Undeniably, I needed some time to recover from *The Apprenticeship*. My first attempts at writing about it were bound to fail. I was still too close to the events to decipher with any objective clarity what I’d learned; too emotional; too jaded. And so for 3 months I didn’t go near anything *nonprophet*. Any post, podcast or article only reminded me of my frustrations and disappointments. But doing so allowed me to adapt.

This adaptation can’t be short cut with specialised techniques or biohacking devices despite what I’d been taught. Mostly, it was a natural and organic process. And the state of the organism determined largely how efficient this process became.

Training is essentially a practice; of balancing workout stimulus and recovery to illicit adaptation. The greater the stimulus, the greater the recovery. Learning is the same.

Given *The Apprenticeship*’s intensity, my prolonged seclusion was necessary. It allowed me to properly integrate and learn much of what I have come to understand now.

So if you asked me what I learned from *The Apprenticeship*, I would say very little. For I don’t believe I have learned very much thus far. But I’m at a better place to start I think. At Chapter One.



AFTERWARD

The Apprenticeship was a radical re-orientation and course correction. And I would not be who and where I am today if it were not for it.

The experience was intensely personal – as all good stories are – but what I learned has been universally transferable. For I have taken these lessons into my relationship, the classroom, the sporting field and beyond.

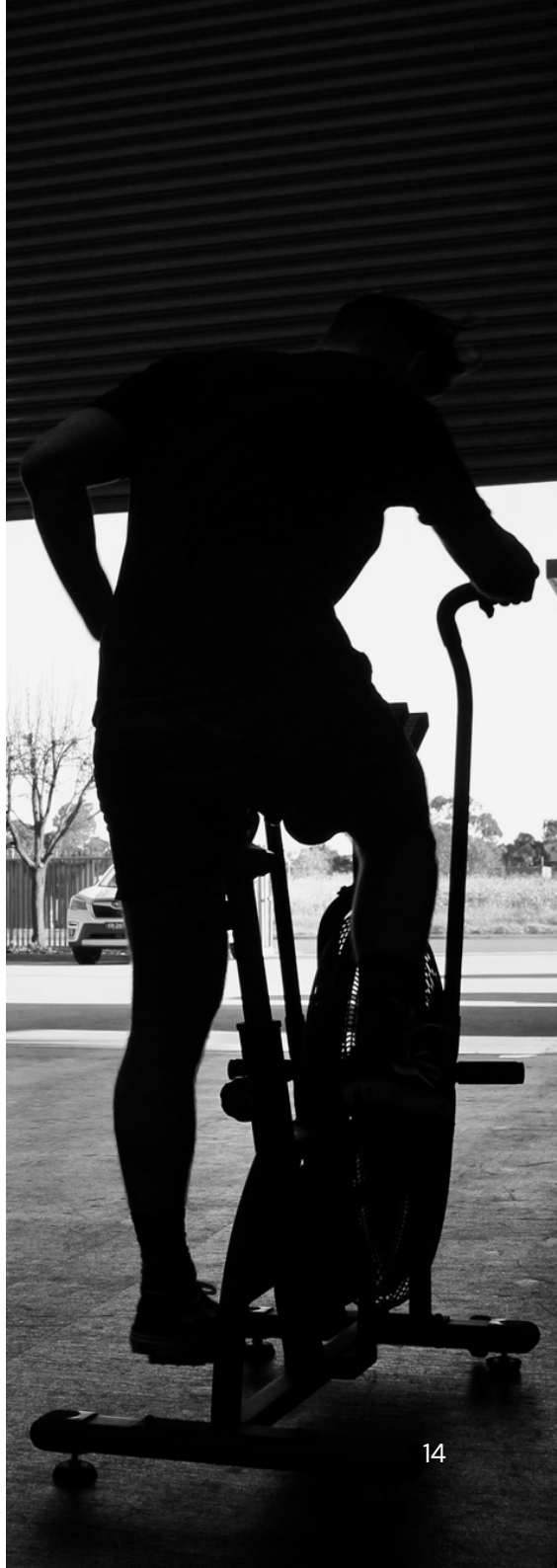
Still, *The Apprenticeship* continues to this day. For the lessons have led to more questions, and the questions have led to more lessons. And the lessons have led to more change.

I suppose that's how I know I'm on the right path though. Because after all...

CHANGE IS THE POINT.

Finally, if you feel this message and it has resonated with you, be sure to reach out. You'll find my contact details on the back cover.

Until next *Chapter*...





CHANGE IS THE POINT

a deeper fitness conversation

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