

RECESS FOR THE SOUL
(Notes from the Inner Playground)

By BERNIE DEKOVEN

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Reviewed by Kathleen Erickson

Recess for the Soul, formerly titled *Notes from the Inner Playground*, is a romp through our inner relationship with ourself, the inner arena necessary for sanity, and a needed place to play. This internal play space keeps us “found” to ourselves.

Only you are there, you being all your selves, the identity I, the perceiver of the identity, the thinker about both of them, etc. All of them as DeKoven puts it, are “some-what fictional characters, but [all] you,” and feel the need to interact. These inner selves play on the inner playground, where they have fun and also plan the transformation of the world.

When the external world is not enough fun, our inner world comes into play: counting, estimating, making self bets & planning rewards, dialoguing with the selves, entertaining them, carrying on an inner lecture circuit, doing improvisation. Here we are always clear and elegant in our speech. We all have our own internal entertainment industry. What I personally do along these lines is rewrite dialogue, from life, from TV shows. Real people or imaginary characters make no difference in the importance of this activity for me.

DeKoven came upon the importance of fun and games when he was working with inner city kids decades ago. He noticed that they could play a loosely structured, simple game for hours with no problems, no boredom, no angst, no conflict. As little game playing as 90 minutes once a week produced noticeable healing, leadership,

character development, and community building in those kids. The author decided to also give himself this gift of weekly play time, when he wouldn’t fight with his selves and would enjoy the inner peace of his own inner playground.

On the CD, DeKoven suggests in detail three games:

1. Freeze Tag. Pretend that you (identity) are not it, and you (the self perceiving) are not it, leaving the “other”, third, you to be it. Notice the strategies that each of your selves uses to “not be it” and to chase the others around.

2. Mother May I. When the author played the game, his selves were the Mother (the one he most wanted to be, the authority), Funny Me, Inner Child Me, Inner Giant Me. It is helpful in these games to notice the strong characteristic that each of the you’s exhibits.

3. Simon Says. After playing this game with several selves, the author says, “What are we hearing from our “Simon”?” Mostly to hit ourselves on the head. We realize

that the way we usually play could be much more fun, that the content of our inner games can be pitifully paltry. Even though we know it’s all pretend, still the selves doubt and dullen each other, and even hurt each other. But after all, there is no Simon! The truth is that on some level this game is fun for us, the selves want to interact, but the author makes us ask: Couldn’t we all have a better game than the one we’re playing and always tend to play?

The CD is clever and charming, with a light touch of humor and

irony, a brilliant little set-piece that has the ability to just slightly alter your perception and make you off-kilter enough to look at how you get through your day, and how you interact with what psychologists increasingly recognize as multiple selves in everyone, neurotic or not.

Even though we have our whole mind to play with, our mental health requires a smaller, fenced-in area where we do less thinking and more meditative, looser game-playing. DeKoven shows us how to build the following pieces of apparatus for the inner playground.

1. The Breathing See-Saw is the mother of all rides and can bring perfect peace. He describes a breathing exercise with 2 selves on a see-saw.

2. The Inner Swing Set has a humorous description of constructing the apparatus for this second breathing exercise.

3. Character Play. Serious and Silly play hide and seek, peekaboo, search for enlightenment, and tag

(except that no one wants to be it). Then they join Naughty and Nice and play Kick the Can, and we are left hanging when Nice decides to get Serious.

I started wondering if selves can switch with each other, or change who it is who is dominating at the moment. Probably the answer is in each of us finding out for ourselves from ourselves how they are all playing it out on your own Inner Playground.

KATHLEEN ERICKSON is Editor of this magazine.

