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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SELF-HELP

Play and Heal: Coming to Know Self through a Playful Attitude

Harvey Katz
AuthorHouse
Unknown $0.00 (pp)
978-1-4490-6169-2

Play and Heal deals with fitness through human psychology, specifically the motivating benefits of a playful attitude. The author progresses through seven chapters on food, movement, breathing, choices, belief systems, body consciousness, and the “myth of the magic recipe.”

Katz is a spiritual counselor who holds a bachelor’s degree in natural health. Currently based in Athens, Greece, he guides people in “spiritual nutrition” and healing through play. As adults, he says, “If we mistakenly believe that play is no longer appropriate for us, we don’t grow up, we just grow old.”

He recommends that readers be actively involved in their own processes, observe their patterns, and take responsibility for their choices. For instance, in the chapter on food, he doesn’t prescribe particular foods, but rather encourages readers to examine their emotional and psychological relationships with eating. He offers case studies and workbook assignments to help in this process.

Similarly, in the chapter on movement, Katz first discusses how exercise is more effective when positive intentions are in place. He provides a set of exercises with an inflatable ball, designed to accomplish a more joyful and childlike way of relating to the body, which will “allow for movement to open up and relax chronic tight spots of the body without creating pain.” At the end of the workout, he suggests, “Breathe deeply, and thank your body for allowing you to play another day.”

The section on breathing is very simple and describes how breath affects emotion. Three exercises are intended to strengthen the lungs, improve the immune system, and calm the body and mind. Chapter four examines choices, inviting the reader to “determine what feelings or filters become active in the choice making that you do.” Again, case studies and specific questions offer a practical approach to making positive choices.

In his chapters on belief systems and body consciousness, Katz delves more deeply into the psychological. He suggests not just tracking what one eats, but how one feels at each stage of the day, and outlines a seven-day program “for Quieting the Old, Cranky, Unhappy, Complaining Voice of Doom.”

Throughout the volume, Katz’s tone is gentle and encouraging, yet authoritative, and his recommendations are simple and acheivable. Acknowledging that there is no magic recipe for success (“This is certainly not the only book you will ever need in searching for how to improve the quality of your life”), he invites readers to love themselves through the process, take responsibility, and deepen their contact with their inner selves.

The book’s glaring flaw is that the author does not consistently evoke images of playfulness. He does not directly include joy in all his exercises and processes, but rather leaves it to the readers to translate his exhortation to be gentle with themselves into their own playful approach.

Despite that flaw, this is a useful little self-help book.

KAREN MCCARTHY (July 12, 2010)

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