Play awakens and engages our sensuality and sexuality. Playful activities create the glue for mutual, innovative endeavors and meaningful relationships. An antidote to suffering, play is healing and restorative. At its essence, play is free, dissolves conflict, and builds connections. Life-giving, play leads us to appreciation and gratefulness.

When we play we discover our deepest self is seeded in creativity and generativity. Play is an act of restoration and remembering. Solitary and contemplative, or active and communal, play can occur anytime, anywhere. Planned, or utterly spontaneous, play brings us into the present moment, embodied in time and place.

People of all ages play. A child in utero will roll, tumble and giggle, pointing toward the time when he or she will become visible in the world. Captivated by movement, color, and sound, infants and young children respond playfully. From a young age, we play in our families and with teams. We often mistake authentic play with performance and competition, winning and losing. Limits to play do not exist. Across gender, race, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and geographical location all people and creatures play—play heals.

Intimacy grows when we play. We engage our senses and body, becoming refreshed and renewed. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, wrote: “But at the same time matter is physical exuberance, ennobling contact, virile effort and the joy of growth. It attracts, renewes, unites and flowers. By matter we are nourished, lifted up, linked to everything else, invaded by life. To be deprived of it is intolerable.” Teilhard reveals to us that matter and creation are intimately linked with our spiritual life. We are embodied; this is good.

Spiritually, play is integral to a vital, healthy, and whole life. Playing is a profound way to pray, and only one letter separates pray from play! The individual that neglects play opts for a stagnant spiritual life. The family or community that ceases to play together will discover aridity of spiritual vitality, initiated by natural forces. Conversely, the person or community that places a value upon play will discover the glue of mutual relationships and life-giving action.

Why are we reluctant to spend time playing and being playful? How often do we muddle through the hours of our day, preoccupied with task and purpose? How come, for many of us, the opportunity to reach beyond the shelf of everyday activity is quite simple, and yet we do not easily budge from our routines? These might be good questions to explore with a spiritual director!

Playing can be a catalyst for spiritual vitality to burgeon forth within each of us. It is through a spirituality of play—interacting with matter—that we encounter the sacred, one another, and our deepest self. Play is a gateway to skip through to increase our ability to be present, to heal, and to grow in gratefulness. Who will accompany you in your next play date? How do you play?

—Pegge Bernecker
I’m up … the only one up. My divine appointment begins with the ocean pounding just outside these walls. This rhythm of in and out, advance and retreat is powerful. This weekend is a retreat for me to escape the routine and boring sameness of the current circumstances I live. Sadness and depression are the chains that bind my spirit and keep me from the playful experience I need and long for. So … here I am, ready to play in God’s playground with God’s beloved children, free to let the real me be me. My sisters here are fun and ready to find the best of this experience, as am I.

It is not a sense of duty and being responsible that is in charge now. It is the inner child running free, barefoot in the sand. God blesses me with this respite of time, a merciful gift and a chance to explore and plumb the depths of my roots. The Divine Gardener is tilling the fertile ground as my branches are pruned to bear more fruit in my old age and I am given another chance to blossom in God’s garden.

The needy child in me wants to play. I have lost a sense of the essence of who I am as I try to conform to the demands of others. Words I heard in the talk today ripple in me, “Play is the glue that holds things together and deepens relationships … Play is the antidote to suffering … Play allows us to forget what weighs us down … Play is being present in the sacrament of the moment … Play is life-giving and brings us to gratitude.”

We’ve been invited to remember how we played as young children. As a child, I was lonely and looked for someone to play with. Playmates were scarce. My family was away working or serving the war effort in the armed service or in defense plants building airplanes. Toys were minimal due to war rationing. I played dress up with my paper dolls, and fantasized them into life. No Barbie’s then. Roller skating was another activity.

Today I rarely give myself permission to play. I’m duty bound by some abstract should tape and a partner who is task-oriented and requires me to join him. Our large family meant lots of work. My people-oriented preference got set aside to do my duty, while my joyful, light-hearted nature was stifled. I enjoy interacting with humor and poking fun at life in a light-hearted way, not with mean-spirited criticism. The little girl inside still loves to sing her song: On The Good Ship Lollipop and entertain others, making them smile. This helps me to smile through the tears I feel in my heart when I let “Shirley” die and my essence grieves.

When I walked the labyrinth I asked the Lord for the wisdom to see my life and the people in my life through God’s eyes. Words like tenderly, gently, with compassion, and understanding offer me hope and encouragement.

—Shirley Filadelfia is a spiritual director living in San Juan Capistrano, California, USA.
Our personality is revealed through play. Whether we choose a solitary act, or play with others, play presents clues about how we interact and engage with the world.

Play can reveal that we are cooperative, creative, and easily inspired. We can also learn about patience, competition, and endurance. As a child, what messages did you receive about playtime? How have your values about play changed, or remained the same? When you set aside a chore or task at hand to spontaneously respond to the invitation of the present moment, what occurs within you? Do you believe that there is a time and place for play, or does a playful constitution underlie all your moments of daily living? How does your sensual experience of being embodied grow through play? What does the way you play reveal to you? What is conveyed to others through your play? Play is ultimately a teacher and restorer of spirit, a revealer of soul. When we play we are recreated, refreshed, and invariably, gratefulness for the present moment and all of creation grows within us.

ENVISIONING

Would you like to spend a full day playing with absolute abandon and embodied delight? How did you play as a child? How do you play, now? What makes you tick? What enlivens you?

Take a few minutes. Imagine you have an entire day to yourself without any obligations. Nothing is on your to-do list. No limitations. Dream and design your ideal play day. Which people, places and activities will you include? Imagine it. Breathe it, see it. Write it down. Then share it with a lover, family member, or friend. Will you give yourself permission to plan for it? Add it to your calendar? Why or why not? Only our conditioned minds limit our ability to play and interact with life.

Listen to women, age thirty to eighty, after a morning of play …

“We laughed together.” “I just got lost, and let go.” “We are giddy!” “It is what it is.” “Only I can make work out of play.” “My essence is playful!” “Why do I always think everything has to be perfect?” “I skipped!” “I haven’t walked on the beach and played in the sand like this for fifty years.” “My lesson as an adult is to learn to be alone a little.” “I am untethered, uncensored, free to be me.” “Pure delight.”

Share your play day on the Spiritual Directors International blog, www.sdiworld.org. What elements of play are you most grateful for? Who needs your presence and play?
March 5-7 - Lenten Retreat Weekend: Nancy Copeland - Payton
Come, take some time away to walk into Lent. Our forty-day journey towards Easter winds through the wilderness, a privileged place where God beckons people to come close. We’ll explore ancient disciplines, and how they can form a posture of our heart. And we’ll savor the surprising gifts of this passage as we say “yes” to divine invitation. Time: Friday 7:00 p.m. - Sunday 1:00 p.m. - Cost: $125

March 12-14 / May 15-17 - Breast Cancer Survivor Retreat: Collaboration with Cancer Patient Care
The group is limited to ten participants. The weekend will consist of meditation, presentation, rest, sharing and more.
Time: 7:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. - Cost: $100 Fee assistance is available - Any donation will help provide for additional retreats.

June 21-27 - A Vacation with God Retreat: Celeste Crine, OSF & Barbara Burkart, LMP
Do you need time to simply LISTEN to where God is leading you? Our Serenity Garden, fountain and near-by Centennial Trail offer an atmosphere of beauty and quiet. A daily presentation will assist you in opening yourself to God’s Presence. Delicious food and the option of gentle movement meditations will round out your experience. Spiritual Direction will be available upon request.
Time: Wednesday 7:00 p.m. - Tues12:00 p.m. - Cost: $400

July 31 - Aug. 6 “Francis 2009 and Clare 2012: Between Two Eighth Centenaries”: Brother Bill Short, OFM
In 2009 the centenary of 800 years of the Franciscan form of life was celebrated. We prepare for the 800th anniversary of the Conversion of Clare in 2012. What do these notable saints of Assisi have to teach us about living more fully the Gospel way of life? Join Brother Bill in exploring their invitation to us in contemporary society.
Time: Saturday 7:00 p.m. - Friday 12:00 p.m. - Cost: $450

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Provocative and sensual, *The Spirituality of Sex* is an exquisite addition to *The Spirituality of…* series of books. Poetry, full-color photography, art, glossy pages, and evocative writing immediately engages the reader. Offering a transformational exploration of sex throughout history, in religious experience, and in masculine and feminine spirituality, *The Spirituality of Sex* challenges us to celebrate matter and our potential as embodied, ecstatic human beings.

Chapters develop the roles that sexuality and the erotic have played for thousands of years. The exploration of Christian, Jewish, and Sufi love mysticism points to the erotic impulse to seek union with the divine. The Tantric and Taoist traditions show how the sexual act can become a spiritual practice that brings about mystical union.

Michael Schwartzentuber writes, “Thankfully, sex is more than just physical performance. Sex is also relationship, mysterious, erotic, exotic, transcendent, and as unique as each human soul” (146). Charlotte Jackson reminds us that, “Genuinely intimate relationships involve self-knowledge. In order to offer something to another, we need to know what we are giving” (129).

Here is the invitation: “Sex at its full spiritual potential is about embracing the body and all the gifts it has to offer. But it is also about so much more than just the body. It is about relationships and love, trust and integrity, respect and awareness, beauty and passion, play and pleasure, thankfulness and joy. It is about freedom and safety, acceptance and encouragement, creativity and change, transformation and fulfillment. It is about birth and death, living and dying, rising and falling, ending and starting over. In short, it is about everything that makes us human and humane” (151). Offering a holistic vision, the text, images, and extensive quotes invite the reader to explore how making love can and will contribute to healing our own relationships, and our wounded world.

Lois Huey-Heck asks, “Are we ready now to value female and male, matter and spirit, body and mind?” (9). Challenging, surprising in places, *The Spirituality of Sex* offers an inquiry into the hope and possibility of a mature, integrated sexuality and relationship with self, other, and the divine.

In the chapter “Sense and Sensuality” Mary Millerd asks the reader to, “Take a moment and say or think the word, sensuality. What is your response to the word? Does it make you feel uncomfortable? Does it excite you? Do you wish your response was different? Notice the thoughts you have. Notice your desire to experience the word. Drop deeper into your body and feel the word. Then find words to describe what you are feeling. What does sensuality feel like to you?” (108).
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Volume 4, Issue 1
Seeking spiritual direction? Go to www.sdiworld.org
Question: Do spiritual directors receive any training? Are spiritual directors self-appointed? I realize Spiritual Directors International does not certify spiritual directors, but is there any kind of screening?

Hoot Hoot: There are many programs that train and form spiritual directors and guides. This is why SDI recommends that you, the seeker, interview a few potential spiritual guides, and ask specifically where they received their training (and if they engage in ongoing formation and training). To give you an idea of the training programs throughout the world Spiritual Directors International provides an interactive Google program locator guide at www.sdiworld.org.

Spiritual directors can “self-appoint” themselves, and more often are confirmed in community, working with retreat centers, churches, synagogues, as chaplains, and so forth. Again, this is a good question to ask a potential spiritual director. A helpful tip: sometimes people “self-appoint” themselves, and no one seeks them. This is an important indication to pay attention to. At other times, people find people approaching them again and again to “talk” and realize they want to receive training to deepen their charism or gift of spiritual direction. You can ask someone how they discovered the inkling to serve as a spiritual director. Some countries and ecclesial authorities have created certification levels that you might find helpful to include in your inquiry.

Screening is done by you, the seeker. This is precisely why SDI recommends that you interview a few potential spiritual directors, and offers all the helpful questions and resources on the Web site at www.sdiworld.org.

—if you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org, or offer your question online at: http://bit.ly/AskOwl.
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“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions …
Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones …”

—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

At Chestnut Hill College, spiritual direction is seen as a contemplative ministry through which spiritual directors help others to notice and respond to God’s movement in the personal and communal experiences of their everyday lives and within all of creation. Our program fosters a community of learners who seek a more holistic future where mind, body, spirit, and the global community can achieve communion and wholeness.

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