

*Were it not for my little jokes, I could not bear the burdens of this office.  
~Abraham Lincoln*

May Spiritual Theme  
*Laughter: The Practice of Holy Play*

Introduction:

For this month's theme we'll open with the following multiple choice question.

Why do we laugh?

- A) Because something is funny (whatever that means).
- B) To relieve stress
- C) To feel superior to a situation or another person
- D) Because we are anxious (I guess that could go along with stress relief).
- E) Because something unexpected happens
- F) For no apparent reason at all
- G) Because the food is **really** good.
- H) All of the above

H is the correct answer, obviously.

This month we explore the relationship between laughter and holy play, which is healthy activity for its own sake that allows us to lose ourselves in the moment in a joyful way. Laughter is a singularly human faculty that can soften and make bearable the suffering and pain that is a part of life. It provides a bridge over which we can connect to each other in a way that is devoid of goals and expectations. Human laughter may have evolved as a way to form alliances. It helps us to remember all the things we have in common. Anthropologists speculate that the smile evolved to communicate a positive disposition to other individuals but smiles became easy to fake so a more complex signal was needed and this is where laughter came in.

"Perhaps I know best why it is man alone who laughs. It is because he suffers so deeply that he had to invent laughter." Frederich Nietzsche.

Not very funny.

On the other hand,

"Laughter is the closest thing to the grace, or unexpected gift, of God." Karl Barth

How about the laughter we experience when a serious interaction or event evolves into something unexpected in a positive way. There are many, many examples of this kind of situation on You Tube, which I recommend as a antidote

to those sudden, **irrational** bouts of anxiety we all experience. My favorite is at <http://www.trendingmonkey.com/cop-pulls-over-drunk-driver-hilarious>.

What about holy play? Play is perhaps the full embodiment of being in the moment. Play is for itself. It is connected with no material interest and there is nothing to be gained from it except the mindlessness and joyful release that it brings. Think of what unleashes feelings inside you akin to those you had as a child when you were just having fun. Remember how lost in the moment you could feel? How the world outside your arena of play simply slipped away? Sharing our joyful curiosities with one another can generate an unspoken and intuitive connection with people we may have nothing else in common with. In play one can be open to whatever drama may unfold. In the video I mention above two people lose themselves in the moment, play off each other, and in the process an unpleasant situation evolves into something hilarious and unexpected. The good feelings that are generated by play and laughter are infectious and can have a profoundly uplifting effect on our community because we are sharing something that makes us feel light and transformed. Play provides a way to offer healing to the world.

### **Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, or with each other:**

1. What makes something funny?
2. How does laughter connect or bond us?
3. When is humor divisive or separating?
4. Can you think of a time when laughter was transformative or healing?
5. When is it important to laugh at yourself (or not)?
6. What does play mean to you as an adult? How does the term 'holy play' change your answer or does it?

### **Quotes and short readings:**

God has a smile on His face. ~Psalm 42:5

Grim care, moroseness, anxiety-all this rust of life ought to be scoured off by the oil of mirth. Mirth is God's medicine. ~Henry Ward Beecher

*Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play. This is the real secret of life-to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play. Alan Watts.*

*You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation. Plato.*