

Play: The Mother of Invention

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Necessity is not “the mother of invention”; play is. Play is a necessity, not merely to develop the bodily and mental faculties, but to give to the individual reassuring contact with his fellows, which he lost when the mother’s nurtural services were no longer required or offered.

Ian Suttie, *The Origins of Love & Hate* (1935)

Play... It is of a higher order than seriousness. Seriousness seeks to exclude play, while play can include seriousness. We moderns have lost the sense of ritual and sacred play. Our civilization is worn with age and is too sophisticated. Then, what is the right way of living? Life must be lived as play; playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing...

Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1938)

Play is the expressive, creative, appropriative, and personal activity through which we make sense of the world.

Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters* (2014)

Play in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

- The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest (Isaiah 11:6-8).
- This is what the LORD Almighty says: Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. (Zechariah 8:4-5)

Play is most often understood according to its qualities

- Voluntary
- Inherent attraction
- Freedom from time
- Diminished consciousness
- Improvisational potential
- Continuation desire (but is not compulsive)

To be play-full is to imaginatively and creatively engage one’s self, others, God, and all of reality so that peace and justice reign within us and with others.

Jaco J. Hamman, *A Play-Full life: Slowing Down and Seeking Peace* (Pilgrim Press, 2011)

The necessity of play transcends age

- Cultivates imagination, curiosity and spirituality
- Fosters relationships and sense of belonging
- Allows for us let go and awaiting return
- Teaches and informs (*paideia*)

- Instills problem solving and a sense of mastery
- Ignites joy, a sense of wellbeing & feeling alive
- Contains destructiveness & aggression
- Cures, corrects, forms and re-creates
- Neoteny: Prolonged juvenile characteristics

The neuroscience & biology of play

- Awakens the cerebral cortex: memory, attention, awareness, thought, language
- Stimulates the motor cortex: gets one physically moving
- Excites the hypothalamus: controls motivation & the Amygdala: regulates social behavior & assists with facial recognition and bodily expression
- Through the release of opioids counters stress (cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine)
- Stimulates brain wave attunement: consciousness & control over one's thoughts

Play personalities

- The joker: nonsense and laughter
- The kinesthete: through movement
- The explorer: through new worlds
- The competitor: rules, keeping score, and winning
- The director: planning and executing
- The collector: holding objects
- The artist/creator: fabricator of objects
- The storyteller: imagination, novelists, writers

Those who cannot play choose...

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| • Control | • Compulsion | • Competition |
| • Criticism | • Conflict | • Consumption |

Practice play as a way of living...

- Boundlessness beckons you to experience life as flowing, abundant, inexhaustible, endless, unending, infinite, ceaseless, and everlasting.
- Realness challenges you to hold polarities or opposites in close relationship and to resist dichotomous thinking (playing vs. working, for example)
- Creativity invites you to use and nurture your imagination and to spend time with those more imaginative than you; Hoping vs. wishing
- Slowness encourages you to resist speeding through life, to savor the tastes, smells, sights, and sounds of life, not appreciate time and space
- Hospitality motions you to create a space in your home or life where you and others can grow, for such spaces carry potential
- Transcendence summons us to experience awe & wonder, and to feel small/insignificant while discerning meaning or value

Best wishes as you empower yourself to be “a master in the art of living.”