

Play-Based Spirituality is a Growing Trend

Americans find more solace in playing than in praying, claims University of Arizona psychologist Dr. Victor Shamas. In a study submitted to the journal *Psychological Science*, Shamas found that people consider playing more beneficial than praying in improving mood and relieving stress. "Playing and praying are more alike than one might think," explains Shamas. "They stem from the same psychological needs and offer similar benefits."

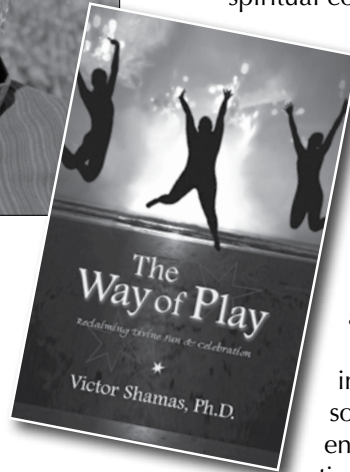
In his new book, *The Way of Play: Reclaiming Divine Fun and Celebration*, Shamas describes a type of spirituality that involves music, rhythm, movement, laughter and other forms of play. *The Way of Play* is based on Shamas' research and personal experiences while traveling through India in 2008. There, he

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discovered a play-based approach to spirituality that has existed for thousands of years. "In India, the notion of divine play is everywhere," Shamas observes. "According to Hindu mythology, the universe was created by a playful spirit purely for its own amusement." In his travels, Shamas encountered numerous individuals who had made divine play the central theme of their spiritual lives, includ-



Dr. Victor Shamas



ing a cave-dwelling yogi, pool-playing swamis, and tantric masters whose spiritual practices were based on the experience of love and joy.

In *The Way of Play*, Shamas offers a framework for integrating play-based spirituality into daily life. Although this type of spirituality is relatively new to the U.S., he says that interest is growing rapidly. "Many Americans already think of play as a spiritual act. They know what it's like to lose themselves in some form of play so that time stands still and distractions disappear. People who have had such experiences often report that their play—more than just about any other activity—brings them in touch with something essential and sacred in themselves."

Shamas cites a growing trend in modern spiritual life: increasing numbers of Americans are moving away from organized religion and toward group experiences that involve dancing, chanting, drumming and other forms of shared play. He observes, "Play circles are the new model of spiritual community. Compared

to conventional religious services, these circles offer a more active, egalitarian, and creative way of fulfilling the religious impulse. In general, people find them to be uplifting and celebratory."

Americans' increased interest in play has social, economic, and environmental implications as well as spiritual ones. "Americans are real-

izing that their work ethic has stopped working," says Shamas. "They can see that working more does not necessarily lead to financial rewards and often has a detrimental effect on health, families, communities, and the environment. Growing numbers of people in the U.S. are arriving at the conclusion that there are distinct benefits to be had in playing more and working less."

The Way of Play: Reclaiming Divine Fun and Celebration by Dr. Victor Shamas is published by Act on Wisdom (actonwisdom.com), PO Box 12484, Tucson, AZ 85732-2484, 520-838-4194.