

## **Dwellers and Seekers**

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In the book, New Directions in the Study of Late Life Religiousness and Spirituality, (Haworth Press 2003) Paul Wick uses the words "dweller" and "seeker" to explore the implications of two types of religious orientation. Wick distinguishes between religious dwellers who find comfort in tradition, and religious seekers who are explorers, feeling comfortable in spaces of their own creation. He believes that "dwelling and seeking are two equally valid and partially overlapping ways of being religious." (page 102) Using a study of 185 persons, it is discovered that while persons who were dwellers by age 30 remained so into later life (age 70), seekers tended to become so beginning in mid-life. While dwellers showed a greater emphasis upon giving and interpersonal care, seekers more strongly expressed themselves by having a personal impact on others and leaving a legacy that would outlive the self. Wick postulates that the world needs both dwellers and seekers, conservers and creators, in order to preserve 'equilibrium between stability and growth.'"

Dwelling and seeking. Two ways of thinking regarding a person's basic approach to their spirituality.

The Wick article sparked an additional thought in me. As I consider my own contact with persons in spiritual distress, I wonder if the image of the dweller/seeker is also a description of the spiritual journey of every resident we encounter. I wonder if the spiritual life, that which is beyond what we can see, touch, taste and feel, is experienced as a rhythm between dwelling and seeking.

The human person continually flows between dwelling (what is my foundation, my paradigm, my understanding/experience of God, self, others) and seeking (what new is breaking into my life that challenges my foundations). Human beings need both. They experience both. Any trauma (change, transition) in life brings about a seeking as one tries to place the new experience within old paradigms. When those old paradigms no longer work, a new paradigm must be sought or developed; otherwise, the person ends in despair. At the same time, a person can not 'live on the edge' forever. Everyone needs and has bench marks, touch points, places of reference whereby we keep our bearings even if we do not exactly know where we are going.

If our spiritual lives are a rhythm between dwelling and seeking, then caregivers have a paradigm with which to do some spiritual triage in the hallway, the waiting room, in the off-handed conversations that occur between client/resident and caregiver. Is the person, at this moment, seeking a place to dwell (to find security, comfort, solace)? Then the spiritual caregiving goal is to support, be a companion, listen. But if the client/resident is in a state of seeking, trying to put new thoughts into old categories of thinking, then the spiritual caregiving task is to encourage, point to new possibilities, and give encouragement to work through the struggle.

The triage question could be: "Is the client/resident looking for an affirmation of what is (dwelling) or are they seeking to forge something new in their lives, which, at first, is always unsettling?"