

What I Wish I Had Learned in Chiropractic College

By Simon A. Senzon, M.A., D.C.

When I think back to chiropractic school, I have many fond memories. We planned to take on the world with our healing hands—to heal the world one spine at a time was our mission. When I think about what I could have learned more of, the obvious things certainly come to mind: more business, more strategic planning and even accounting would have been helpful. Yet, those things are not what I think of in terms of that grand mission.

Don't get me wrong; more entrepreneurial training would have been a great boon. But when it comes to changing the world, four things come to mind. They all come down to greater tools to communicate chiropractic to the world and especially to other chiropractors—the profession, the ones that were less fortunate in their education or not open to the true miracle of chiropractic, as espoused by B.J. and D.D. Palmer. As far as I am concerned, if these four things were taught to even a few hundred chiropractic students, the entire profession would be transformed and that mission above would be closer than ever.

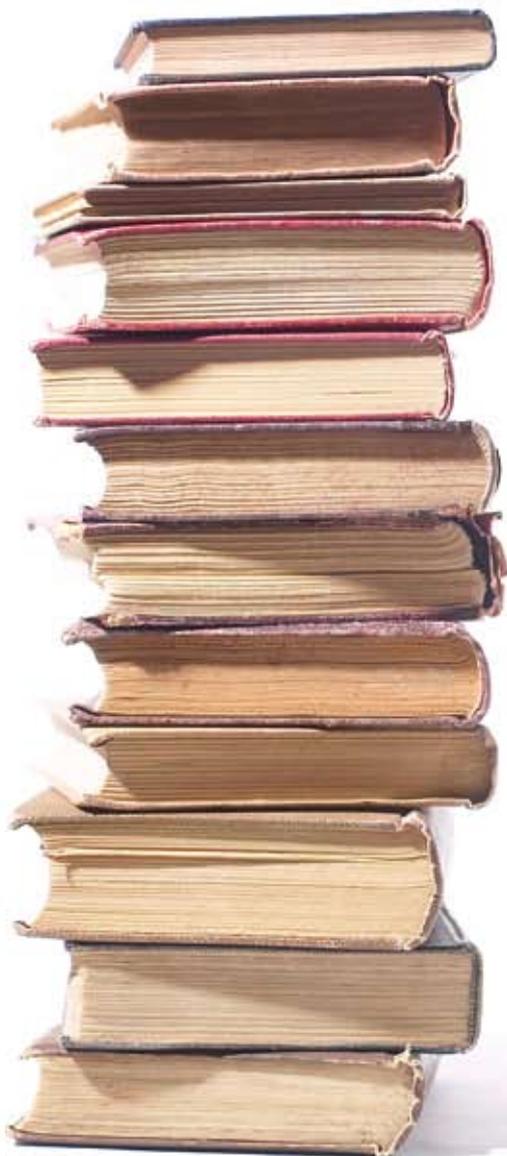
What I wish I had learned: to more fully understand the holistic depth and transformational power of the chiropractic adjustment on the human organism; to be able to articulate the intricate relationship of my finite consciousness to the infinite intelligence that pervades the universe; the history of chiropractic and how it emerged in our culture; and finally an integrative framework that would put all of these things together in a way that I could explain them to

the world, to the profession, to my patients, and also apply this to how I operate my practice. As B.J. might have said, "Simple enuf!"

It was quite lucky for me, actually, that I didn't learn all of those things. I was luckier still that I had such wonderful teachers in my pre-chiropractic studies in history and philosophy. I consider this lucky because I have been able to spend the last 10 years filling in the gaps and searching out the answers to these questions, finding the things that I wish I had learned in chiropractic college. This is so important because of the conflicts in the profession today. I needed to know how to best address the core issues involved, the actual principles.

A COMPLICATED PAST

There is a revisionist trend in the history of chiropractic today, which claims that the philosophy of chiropractic was only developed to win legal battles. And now that the profession is established, the philosophy should be abandoned. This trend is partially true; the philosophy was indeed used to legalize chiropractic. The first landmark court case to establish chiropractic's legitimacy was in 1907, *Wisconsin vs. Morikubo*. In the case it was shown that chiropractic had a distinct philosophy. After this case, B.J. Palmer had the faculty grant him a Ph.C., he retitled his 1906 book to include philosophy in the title, and then in 1910 D.D. Palmer's book was published and it, too, addressed philosophy. According to this revisionist approach to history,



the philosophy of chiropractic was a legal ploy. Chiropractic became a distinct profession in the courts because it had a distinct philosophy and approach to health.

The revisionists would have us believe the surface only. The fact is, there were about 3,300 court cases against chiropractors won on these grounds. B.J. was an expert witness in many of the trials. Are we to leave it at that or go deeper? I wish chiropractic school had prepared me to discuss these questions. This revisionist argument implies that D.D. Palmer used his final years to create a fictitious philosophical legal defense (that, by the way, was a clear descendent from his Mesmeric, and Spiritualist roots). Are we also to believe that his son B.J. was to spend the next 54 years espousing and evolving a philosophical system of life, health and spirit just for legal reasons?

By simply understanding what Palmer was reading in the 1880s and how similar those writings were to the philosophy that he eventually wrote down in 1910, the whole revisionist argument falls apart. I suggest that Palmer used this new legal strategy as an excuse to finally write down his philosophy, a philosophy that he had held for many years prior to 1907. But it doesn't end there. We are still left with the thorny questions of the philosophy itself; can you scientifically prove innate intelligence, or the more difficult components, dealing with spirituality, or rather, awakening to the universal intelligence from within as it relates to the chiropractic adjustment? Both of these components are linked in the Palmers' writings, and no advances to the philosophy of chiropractic in the last 40 years can change that. And that is at the heart of the criticisms of chiropractic's vital roots. These same critics don't only challenge the history, but the philosophy, the principles—all of it.

COMMUNICATING D.D.'S DISCOVERY

What else could I have learned in chiropractic school that would give me the tools to meet these challenges head-on?

I would like to focus on the history of chiropractic and its context as this is vitally important to all the others as well as the revisionist argument. As most chiropractors know, D.D. Palmer was a magnetic healer for eight years prior to the development of chiropractic. Besides his scientific studies, he studied books on magnetic healing and spiritualism for 30 years prior to the publication of his first book. He wanted to know how to help the sick body to be healthy, and also how to assist humanity

to develop new levels of spiritual depth—levels that would carry over beyond death itself. He wanted to know why one person was healthy and another ailing. None of his previous studies taught him this. It was only with his discovery of chiropractic that it became apparent.

The fact that Palmer's discovery grew out of the fertile American culture is relevant for us today. His thoughts, ideas and studies were linked to the ideas of his time and ideas, which had their roots in history and philosophy. Palmer's discovery of chiropractic has been chronicled in several scholarly books on the history of religion and healing. In those books the links to nature religion in America, Mesmerism and Spiritualism are evident as these were Palmer's philosophical and practical roots. Rather than some made-up legal defense, the philosophy of chiropractic was the product of a long lineage in Western and more specifically American history. I wish I had learned all of this. Learning these things would have better prepared me to address Palmer's critics today. I would also be better able to communicate the richness of chiropractic to my patients and the world.

INNATE INTELLIGENCE, THE ADJUSTMENT AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

By focusing only on the physical processes that keep the body organized and optimally in a state of maximum health, a natural link is made to several important scientific theories of the 20th century. Alongside chiropractic's growth and development, theories and models in biology have grown. Starting with holism and organicism in the 1920s, systems theory and cybernetics in the 1940s, open systems, dynamical systems and chaotic systems in the 1970s, complex systems in the 1990s, and currently nonequilibrium thermodynamic systems, there are literally over a dozen models of living organism that describe the inherent rules of self-organization and dynamic health. Chiropractic is a fertile research ground to test many of these theories. Could we show that the chiropractic adjustment assists the organism to self-organize with greater energy efficiency? Express health more dynamically? I should hope so.

As to the relationship between the chiropractic adjustment and spiritual awareness, we cannot stay silent. The writings of B.J. Palmer sit waiting to be understood and interpreted for what they were—a precursor to the human potential movement, a foreshadow of the

explanations of self-actualizing human beings, and a push into the mystical realms touched upon by the greatest sages the world has known. B.J.'s explanation of the relationship between the expression of health, the contact of the super-conscious, and the relationship to the universal oneness should really be viewed as some of the greatest spiritual writings of the last century. If only I studied these writings in chiropractic school and compared them to the first humanistic and transpersonal psychologists of the 1960s, to the originators of the human potential movement, or to the research into the development of consciousness. There is an abundance of research today that explores these higher reaches of human nature that Palmer described. If only we could rise to make these connections rather than shirk our historical origins. The obvious spiritual depth that is each person's birthright can and should be linked to the chiropractic adjustment, but without the proper context, research and reference, it is a very difficult question to explore.

And so, if I had learned these things, I would have applied them to practice from day one. All of my communications with patients, colleagues and the world, would have been different. My interactions with patients would have been transformed. Certainly my technique would be understood through the latest advances in theoretical biology. A more solid basis for history, philosophy and science would become part of the culture and society of chiropractic. New dialogues with critics and revisionists would emerge, new depth of understanding would unfold. My life would certainly be richer and so would each person that I touch. Healing the world, one spine at a time would be one chiropractor closer.

TCL

Suggested Reading

- "Spiral Dynamics" by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan (Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2005)
- "Integral Spirituality" by Ken Wilber, (Shambhala 2006)
- "Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America" by Eugene Taylor (Counterpoint Press, 1999)
- "The Law of Life" by B.J. Palmer (1957)
- "The Known Man" by B.J. Palmer (1936)
- "The Self Organizing Universe" by Erich Janstch (Pergamon, 1980)