



Our Roots in Morality

By Simon Senzon, D.C.

In his final years, D.D. Palmer tried to take back his newly formed profession by attempting to redirect chiropractic's legal battle. He did not agree with the stance forged by his son B.J. and the famous lawyer, Tom Morris, in their approach to establish chiropractic as a legal entity through court cases. D.D. Palmer wanted the legal debate to center around chiropractic as a new form of morality, one that stemmed from a moral calling to assist individuals in their physical, mental and spiritual evolution. This was very different than the successful campaign developed by B.J. and Morris, which began with the Morikubo case in 1907 and within 30 years led to over 3,300 court cases around the United States, with Morris winning most of them. Their central argument was that chiropractic was a separate and distinct profession with its own philosophy, science and art.

While D.D. Palmer clearly embraced this approach as seen in the title of his first book, "The Text-Book of the Science, Art and Philosophy of Chiropractic" (1910), he was not happy that many of his students, including his son, were defining chiropractic in their own terms and now using their definitions in the courts to define it. For example, the basis of Morris' defense in the Morikubo case was the first chiropractic book,

"Modernized Chiropractic" (1906) by Smith, Langworthy and Paxson (three of D.D.'s students). Palmer's call for a new legal strategy is most evident in his final book, published by his widow in 1914, one year after his death. In the book titled, "The Chiropractor," Palmer wrote a short essay, "The Moral and Religious Duties of the Chiropractor." His need to redirect the legal question is also explained in a letter that he wrote to a jailed chiropractor in 1911. Before looking at some quotes from these documents and discussing their importance, let's first look at the context and what the profession's founder was up against.

D.D. PALMER'S CHALLENGES AROUND 1907

At the time of the Morikubo case, where chiropractic was deemed separate and distinct from osteopathy, D.D. Palmer was in Oklahoma. He had recently had good and bad news. As for the bad news, he had lost his fourth wife, been to court three times in as many years on three different charges, the final one landing him in prison for almost a month (where he may have suffered a significant head injury according to Maynard's account in "Healing Hands" [1959] due to a fall), and was forced to sell all interest in his school to

his son. As to the good news, his grandson was born and he married his fifth wife, Molly. While in Oklahoma, Palmer opened a grocery store and eventually the Palmer-Gregory School of Chiropractic (which lasted three months), and then "The Fountain Head School," in 1908, at 513 West Grand in Oklahoma City (which also did not last long).

Not only did Palmer lose in court in 1906, resulting in the prison term for practicing medicine without a license, but he also failed as an expert witness defending a chiropractor in LaCrosse, Wis., in 1905. His attempt to prove chiropractic's merits on science alone was not working. And now, based on the Morikubo case, not only was philosophy being used to establish chiropractic's legality, but also new scientific terms such as intervertebral foramina and vertebral subluxation and also new artistic terms such as the dynamic thrust and spontaneity were being introduced. (Smith, Langworthy and Paxson were the first to officially introduce all of those terms into the profession.) Palmer was faced with protecting and preserving not only chiropractic, but also his version of it.

From 1906 until his death in 1914, Palmer moved several times: first from Iowa to Oklahoma, then to Oregon and finally to California.

In each location he was involved in teaching chiropractic and most importantly, writing. His articles between 1908 and 1910 developed into his first book. His writings after that developed into his second book (published posthumously). It was through his writings that he proved himself to be an accomplished anatomist and physiologist (both self-taught) and also a philosopher. He drew on his years of study of theosophy, magnetic healing and spiritualism to develop his view on chiropractic's philosophy. It is assumed that he taught many of these ideas to his students from the beginning, but this is the first time that he systematically wrote them down.

PALMER RESHAPES CHIROPRACTIC

It is well known to most chiropractors that Palmer viewed "tone" to be the foundation of chiropractic. According to Gaucher-Perslherbe in his book, "Chiropractic: Early Concepts in their Historical Setting" (1995), Palmer used the term "subluxation" as an organizing concept. Subluxation was a useful way to integrate his other ideas such as Innate Intelligence, the nervous system as a regulator of tone, and his spiritual ideas of Universal Intelligence and the role of the chiropractic adjustment as the catalyst to advance the individual's personal development in this life and the next. Palmer integrated the many concepts being used by B.J. Palmer and his other students to establish chiropractic's identity in the courts while still using his own terms to define chiropractic his way.

His expansion of the philosophy however was not enough for Palmer; he also added morality and religion into the mix. Palmer's attempts to influence chiropractic's legality is most notable in his writings on morality and religion. These ideas are written about in both of his books, as well as a letter found by Joe Keating in the Palmer Archives in 1995. The letter was to P.W. Johnson, a jailed chiropractor. It was written on May 4, 1911. In the letter Palmer wrote,

"You ask, what I think will be the final outcome of our law getting. It will be that we will have to build a boat similar to Christian Science and hoist a religious flag. I have received chiropractic from the other world, similar as did Mrs. Eddy. No other one has laid claim to that, not even B.J... Exemption clauses instead of chiro laws by all means, and let that exemption be the right to practice our religion."

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS DUTY

But what Palmer meant by religion had more to do with a moral dictate and a personal experience,

not a formalized institution. He was not trying to establish a religion in the common sense of the term; it was more of a religious impulse or a feeling that was associated with the inner knowledge of one's connection to the universal intelligence. In his final book, Palmer wrote, "The philosophy of chiropractic teaches the universality of intelligence and that its aim is always onward and upward toward perfection. This truth makes the practice of chiropractic a moral and a religious duty both in theory and in fact."

For Palmer this did not change the science, art or philosophy, it merely added to it a moral obligation, a religious duty that he felt each chiropractor should harness. He continued, "Morally, chiropractors are in duty bound to help humanity physically. Religiously, they are required to render spiritual service toward God, the Universal Intelligence, by relieving mankind of their fetters, adjusting the tension-frame of the nervous system, the physical lines of communication to and from the spirit."

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It is from this basis that Palmer justifies his use of religious terminology. He was going back to his roots, the texts that he had been studying for years, known as D.D.'s Traveling Library, and establishing his belief in chiropractic's purpose. All of these writings came after the initial court cases and after his continual failures in establishing chiropractic on its own scientific merits. By mapping out the religious duty of chiropractors toward the Universal Intelligence as a central doctrine of chiropractic, Palmer was consciously creating a culture. He realized that science, art and philosophy alone were not enough to establish chiropractic for the future. He wanted to make sure that the moral and religious elements were firmly established.

WHERE THE DOCTRINE STANDS TODAY

This legacy of a moral and religious duty still maintains a tenuous grip on the chiropractic profession. Most chiropractors are content to maintain at least one or two of the three pillars that B.J. and Morris promoted in the courts; sci-

ence, art and philosophy. Viewing chiropractic as a moral obligation is not generally discussed, although in some corners of the profession it remains central.

What if this became a new rallying cry for the profession? What if the moral duty of the chiropractor was a topic of health talks and chiropractic classes? Imagine if chiropractors worldwide grasped the depth of Palmer's vision and decided to act on it. This would entail nothing less than a worldwide shift in the profession itself because the focus would be different, Universal Intelligence would become the center and the chiropractic adjustment would be viewed as a vital aspect of every human being's life. In Palmer's words, "Therefore, inasmuch as the light of life was revealed to me in order that I should enlighten the world, and as our physical health and intellectual progress of the personified portion of the Universal Intelligence depend upon the proper alignment of the skeletal frame, I feel it

is my right and bounden duty to replace any displaced portion thereof, so that our physical and spiritual faculties may be fully and normally expressed; thereby not only enhancing our present condition but making ourselves the

better prepared to enter the next stage of existence, to which this earthly existence is but a preliminary, a preparatory step."

I believe that we could take these final words of Palmer's in several ways. One could believe them outright; especially if one's religious and spiritual leanings include the importance of an afterlife. But I think it is even more appropriate, based on what we know today about human development, that the chiropractic adjustment could act to assist any individual to enter the next phase of his or her own personal development in this life! We know that individuals evolve through wider and deeper levels of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development. Each new level is very much like a new life. The moral and religious duty is aligned to this perspective, that the adjustment assists the individual to embody his or her spirit more fully, universal intelligence more completely, and their own ideal expression more perfectly. And this would profoundly change the profession by transforming the relationships between chiropractors and their patients.