



The Root of Subluxation

By Simon A. Senzon

Everyone knows that D.D. Palmer was at the forefront of holistic health (at least everyone should know this!). When we think of the legacy that Palmer left to the world, we can step back in amazement and awe. Not only did he develop chiropractic, establish its central principles, theories, and practices, but he was also a pioneer of a new way to view health and disease, wellness and illness, causation and restoration, disorganization and reorganization, death and life. Central to the vision that he initiated, one that has developed into the culture of ultimate wellness, are the different levels of health: physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual. When we talk of these levels in regards to Palmer's theories, the discussion is often about the linkage between spirit and matter or the expression of optimal potential. These levels are rarely discussed in terms of Palmer's triad of disease causation; trauma, poisons and auto-suggestion. Let's examine how they might relate as this may provide yet another insight into Palmer's genius and help us to better understand the holistic nature of chiropractic's central tenets.

Thoughts, traumas, and toxins have been described for years as the three causative agents of vertebral subluxation. Dr. Ted Morter, founder of Bio-energetic Synchronization Technique coined this particular triad. Historically, we can look to D.D. Palmer, who wrote in 1910, "The determining cause of disease are traumatism, poison and auto-suggestion." This is similar to yet another triad: Body (poisons/toxins), Heart (emotional trauma/stress), and Mind (thoughts/auto-suggestion). These are of course three of the levels of wellness, physical, emotional and mental. This is a very important linkage especially if chiropractic is going to continue its leadership role in holistic health and the development of body, heart, mind and spirit as the pillars of wellness.

It is interesting to note that spirit is not mentioned as one of the causes although we can certainly see how Palmer and Morter concluded that spirit was often blocked because of these three and especially because of vertebral subluxation. According to both of them spirit played a large role in the restoration of health as the expression of innate intelligence.

Palmer's complete theory is a bit more extensive. You can get a feel for it with some words that he wrote just before the above quote,

"When studying the etiology of disease, we should remember, that underlying the manifestations of health and disease, are: the ceaseless, complex

vital transformations which supply energy in varying amounts, which maintain life as expressed in health and disease.”

“Impingements, poisons and intense thinking, auto-suggestion, unrelieved change of thot, insufficient rest and sleep, increase or decrease the momentum of impulses. In the study of pathology we should look to the etiological factors which, by their exciting or debilitating effects, retard or liberate stored up energy, resulting in abnormal functioning and morbid structure...” (1910, p. 859)

Most chiropractors acknowledge that the body will be affected by all of these things and that these can often be the underlying cause of the vertebral subluxation or an important factor in the process of health, restoration, wellness and reorganization. Many chiropractors ask about physical, chemical, and emotional stresses during their initial assessments. How else can we assess for body, heart, and mind as the causes of vertebral subluxation? Would that make us medical doctors or psychologists? While steering clear of those domains, we can certainly acknowledge the causative agents while focusing on the subluxation especially if it is the result of thoughts, traumas or toxins.

The body itself is a miraculous expression of life’s constant striving toward self-transcendence. Each new mode of being whether it be physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual is a new level of organization that emerges from the alchemical mixture of life’s many stressors both healthy and unhealthy. When one of these three elements is at the root of the person’s dis-ease, subluxation or disease, it is important to understand that and in some cases to find out, “if there is anything else going on,” as these three causes are often related as are body, heart and mind.

The relationship between these three is vitally important to understanding not only what may have caused the subluxated state, but also the journey toward health. For example, thoughts can lead to physical and emotional distress, which can predispose an individual to more chronic vertebral subluxations. In regard to auto-suggestion, Palmer wrote, “This condition is due to an underlying psychical impressionability exhibited in paralysis, contracture of muscles, impairment of vision, sensory and functional disturbance, more or less of the nervous system.” He acknowledged way back then, before the advent of psychoneuroimmunology described by Pert and others, the emotional motor system described by Holstege, or psychosomatic approaches to health, that thoughts could directly



Each human being is comprised of a physical body and its senses, an emotional system and its many facets, a mental domain that allows us to focus on what is at hand and also to see the wider perspective, and a spiritual domain that connects to our own deepest sense of being.

affect the musculature, the organ systems and any other system governed by the nerves.

In regard to traumatism, Palmer wrote of physical and mental/emotional traumas. This was way before Seyle’s stress adaptation response, or the host of body/mind approaches that have developed since. Palmer acknowledged that not only thoughts as in auto-suggestion, but

the emotions, the heart, can be affected by traumas great and small. And this can cascade into vertebral subluxation and most importantly to Palmer result in abnormal tone. For him the tonicity of the tissues was the most important element in the expression of health and life.

Palmer also pointed out the effects of poisons on the tissues. Even without an ingestion of poisons or toxins, which are common in our foods and our environment today, the bodily responses from the other two causative aspects of the triad can create inflammation responses and a host of other biochemical changes that could result in vertebral subluxation, dis-ease and disease.

It is important to distinguish between Palmer’s use of this triad in describing disease and the use of the triad to assist people in their health and wellness. Palmer acknowledged the causative factors and yet focused on restoring tone to the nervous system. He did not want other systems to interfere with chiropractic. This is evident in his critiques of some of his students and their methods such as Carver who utilized auto-suggestion and Langworthy who included various modalities. Palmer acknowledged that body, heart, and mind were at the root of subluxation and disease but did not address them directly.

Taking a wider perspective of these three causes we can view them as central aspects of what it means to be human. Each human being is comprised of a physical body and its senses, an emotional system and its many facets, a mental domain that allows us to focus on what is at hand and also to see the wider perspective, and a spiritual domain that connects to our own deepest sense of being and also to the universe as well as the inner depths. These are so intertwined that it is difficult to pinpoint one as a specific cause as they easily cascade and support each other in health and disease. A toxic stressor could affect our mood, our thoughts, and our ability to express our highest aspirations, an emotional or physical trauma can affect our biochemistry, our ability to focus, and our brain chemistry, a repetitive thought pattern could also affect all of these. Did Palmer discover a new route to the transformation of body, heart, mind and spirit by suggesting that whatever the cause, the free expression of the body’s innate wisdom was a major factor in the cure? This is not suggesting the old, one cause, one cure ideology, but offering a deeper perspective that many of the expressions of disease could be rooted in these three levels, show up indirectly as vertebral subluxation, and open us to a path of greater wellness through the chiropractic adjustment.