

Thom Gelardi's Foreword to

Success, Health, and Happiness:
The Epigrams of B.J. Palmer
by Simon Senzon

Recently, my sister and I were reminiscing about our parents, and she remarked how our father frequently used aphorisms in his conversations. I can hear him now saying, "God helps those who help themselves" and "You can achieve anything you want, if you want bad enough." I believe Dad and his aphorisms influenced my life far more than he ever imagined.

I don't know whether it was inheriting a few of Dad's genes or being exposed to his predilections, but I certainly have a great appreciation for aphorisms and epigrams. While in college, I read Norman Vincent Peal's book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, wherein he recommended that one fill their mind with aphorisms and call upon selected ones as needed. That habit has served me well through the years. If I could not find one appropriate to a recurring situation, I would compose my own. During challenging times, I would remind myself that the measure of a man is what it takes to get him down. Or when inclined to self-pity, I would advise myself to either lie down and give up or get up and go, but not waste time and energy hanging around the middle ground.

My life has been greatly influenced by the philosophers, no less by B.J. Palmer. It is said when the student is ready the teacher appears; perhaps I was ready. Through my father's advice, I came at an early age to believe in the power of self-discipline, and that I was here for a purpose. As a young person, plagued with health problems and unaware of the label "vitalism," I innately believed my body had the intelligence to maintain its own health. I also believed life is purposeful and moves forward. So, I was ready for B.J.

Dr. B. J. Palmer, or just B. J. as he preferred, was a renaissance man in both knowledge and deed. He was not a complex or conflicted person. He was a rather simple man, grounded in a philosophy, which held that a person could tap into their infinite innate mind as a source of wisdom and guidance. Listening to his innate wisdom drove him and gave him the knowledge to do the many and varied things he undertook. I wonder if B.J.'s innate mind was the source for the synthesis of information already stored in his photographic memory. His practical and logical mind was filled with data from many fields, including anatomy, physiology, clinical chiropractic, philosophy, anthropology, speleology, history, literature, and archaeology. His writings on self-reliance and the work ethic parallel those of Emerson and Elbert Hubbard.

B.J. also loved the business of movies, radio, and television. He chartered WOC, the second radio station in the U.S. and the first to sell commercial time. His book *Radio Salesmanship* became a standard college textbook for effectively writing on-air communications. He wrote some 30 volumes, many of them on chiropractic philosophical and clinical subjects. Others were on a wide variety of topics, ranging from the lost civilizations in Cambodia to the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy to theories of reincarnation. His books, along with items for his chiropractic school and his radio/television companies, were printed at his own printing and publishing company. He was president of the Palmer School of Chiropractic and Director of the

B. J. Palmer Chiropractic Research Clinic and the Clearview Sanitarium. He served for several terms as president of the International Chiropractor's Association and lectured worldwide.

When I entered the Palmer School of Chiropractic in January of 1954, I found just about every inch of each wall covered with epigrams. They were on the outside of the buildings, in the stairwells, above the urinals in the men's room, and even on the walls of the elevator shafts. One could not help but read them, and through repeatedly seeing them they became part of one's thoughts and one's self.

Above each doorway entering the campus buildings were the words, "Enter to Learn How" and on the leaving side of the doorways were the words, "Go Forth and Serve." I found we students also learned the why, something as important as the how. It was because of the why I have tried to dedicate my life to serving.

Influenced as much by B.J.'s example as from his powerful lectures, I carried away from his teachings an understanding of the great wisdom running through our bodies. Whether it is called "innate intelligence," as he preferred, or just nature, as it is commonly understood, this concept perceived in all living things, has a fundamental self-interest.

B.J. may not have been the first to influence me. Regarding the core of his philosophy however, in regards to "the student being ready," he was. His concept of the Innate Intelligence having one mission; to look after the matter (the body and life) in which it resides was new. It was consistent with the idea of self-interest being normal and natural, and comfortable. This fit with my core beliefs. I learned to give all patients, regardless of their station in life or ability to pay the best care possible, and believe this has much to do with the doctor's health, self-esteem, stress level, charisma, prosperity, and joy of living.

Not only were epigrams on the walls, but B. J. spoke epigrammatically. We frequently heard his deep sonorous voice advise us, "Get the Big Idea; all else follows" or "We never know how far reaching something we may think, say, or do today will affect the lives of millions tomorrow."

I consider myself most fortunate to have attended Palmer School of Chiropractic during the time B. J. was its president. The profession was only about fifty years old at the time, and it was experiencing the pains and joy of bringing this new teaching and service to the world. Chiropractic was not a career choice, it was a mission. Indeed, B. J.'s "Spizzerinctum!",¹ was everywhere.

Not everyone in the profession loved B. J. Some had difficulty accepting his strict adherence to putting principle above personality, of having the clinical and social advancement of chiropractic the standard for determining the value of his every decision, and his uncompromising effort to maintain the integrity of chiropractic as a separate and distinct profession. But, whether one loved or hated him, everyone agreed that his leadership was essential for chiropractic's early meteoric growth throughout the world.

Those who knew B.J. more intimately than I confirm what I gleaned from my experience; B.J. was a very ethical person. He had a great belief that infallible natural law determined personal success as it did personal health, and that acting ethically and virtuously were indispensable parts of those cycles.

The Palmer School was situated on most of a city block in Davenport, Iowa. Among the few exceptions to Palmer buildings on the block was a Catholic Convent. A number of nuns, brothers and priests were chiropractic practice members, and some attended B.J.'s public lectures. I recall attending one of those lectures. I had to wonder how the clergy felt when B. J. said, "All religions are man-made and I'm the man who made my religion." From his lectures

and writings, it seems to be that B.J.'s spiritual persuasion was similar to Einstein's pantheism or Thomas Jefferson's deism.

Betty, my wife, once mentioned to Dr. Agnes Palmer, B.J.'s daughter-in-law, how impressed we were with the writings of Ayn Rand. Before she could tell her that I was requiring students in my philosophy class to read *The Fountainhead*, Agnes said that B.J. had required his students to read *The Fountainhead* in his philosophy course. I could easily understand B.J. appreciating Ayn Rand's rationalism and objectivist philosophy. Also like Rand, B. J. tended to see and communicate concepts in simple black and white terms.

B. J. was, and continues to be, a person ahead of his time. He speculated about the evolution of the species and how one of man's developing faculties is cosmic awareness. He lectured that health is the normal state of being, and when not interfered with, the innate striving of the body was usually sufficient for the regaining and maintaining of one's health.

B. J. was the living embodiment of maximizing every minute, as he often spoke about his abhorrence of goat feathers and time wasters. His motivational talks and writings consisted of rational explanations rather than esoteric rituals or authoritative commands. He was always substantive.

If you had an appointment with B. J., you had better be on time. My good friend and mentor Dr. Lyle W. Sherman, was the assistant director of the B. J. Palmer Chiropractic Research Clinic and the namesake of Sherman College of Straight Chiropractic. He worked with B. J. longer than any other chiropractor. I once asked him how B. J. was able to accomplish so much. He explained how B. J. would awake at 4 a.m. each morning, and, in good weather, he would walk in the college gardens, generally near its fountains. There he would write his notes for the day. This was before pocket voice recorders. He would then answer correspondence, often typing his own letters, perhaps give a class lecture, and write. At 11 a.m. he would enter the research clinic, expecting his patients to be ready for him to perform his spinal analysis and if necessary a vertebral adjustment. When he finished attending to his last patient, he would go to his specially made typewriter that used rolls rather than sheets of paper. He would immediately begin typing; his two index fingers would fly over the keys. When the last key was struck, he went directly to the radio/television station, WOC, which was located across the street from the campus, where he would meet with certain members of the staff. He expected them to be in his office or the conference room, prepared and waiting for him. This fast pace went on until evening. Very few things would keep B. J. up past 9 p.m. If you were visiting with him when 9 p.m. arrived, he would thank you for the visit and leave for bed.

When I was a student, he had already retired from classroom lecturing, but he occasionally would give a special morning lecture to several classes at one time in one of the smaller auditoriums. When he did this, he would stand at the entrance door looking at his big pocket watch. When the appointed time came, the door would be closed and no one dared enter.

One time, I met B. J. outside the campus' main building, and wanting to engage him in a personal conversation, I had a philosophical question ready. I went up to him and asked, "May I please have a minute with you, B. J.?" His response was one word, a dispassionate "No." Reflecting on that experience, I fully realized how B. J. took ownership of every minute of his 24 hours. I thought I would try that with my students, but could never muster the courage.

During annual Lyceum lectures, if a baby cried and was disturbing the audience, B. J. would stop his lecture and deliver one of his famous lines. Everyone knew it was coming. He would say, "Crying babies are like New Year's resolutions; they should be carried out." He would smile and the audience, and generally the parent, would laugh.

B. J. was a driven man, but he was also kind and considerate. Some second-generation chiropractors tell me that when they were children and their parent or parents were students at the Palmer School, B. J. always took time to talk to them. Dr. Sherman told me of a female patient at the research clinic who was near death, and after some cajoling, still would not cooperate in her care. One day, after B. J. gave her a good scolding, he went into his office and began to cry in empathy for her condition.

B. J. was also exceedingly generous. Tuition at the Palmer School was low because much of the income from his two radio/television stations, WOC, Davenport, and WHO, Des Moines, financially supported Palmer School. Dr. Sherman said that B. J. personally donated \$180,000 a quarter, a considerable sum at the time, to the Research Clinic during the 1940s. Sherman knew B. J. also donated to the chiropractic school, but he did not know how much. One exemplary story about B. J. that has always stuck with me was that of a loyal employee at WOC who became permanently disabled. B. J. saw to it that he received his full salary for the many remaining years of his life.

B.J. stressed when people or organizations look outward to serve, they grow and flourish, and when they look inward, they atrophy. He said, "Cast your bread upon the waters, and it will return sandwiches." That witticism certainly has remained true in my life. I try to give abundantly, for giving immediately enriches my spiritual life. I am certain the act of giving also has a good effect on body chemistry. Those sandwiches have returned abundantly to me through the assistance and support of many individuals, frequently from those I have never served. I do not question how the law works, although I have some ideas. But, I have seen this law operate unflinchingly in my own life and the lives of others.

Simon Senzon's categorization of the epigrams from B. J. Palmer's book, *As a Man Thinketh*, is, if not a stroke of genius, a great bounty to many. *Success, Health, and Happiness: The Epigrams of B. J. Palmer* will introduce another generation to a work that has influenced the lives of thousands over the years, and it also will change the way the epigrams are used. Rather than simply browsing, one now can access—for guidance or contemplation—all the epigrams in a particular subject area. As a result, the following pages reveal Palmer to a wider audience as one of the twentieth century's greatest minds and benefactors.

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