

SUCCESS, HEALTH, AND HAPPINESS

The Epigrams of B.J. Palmer

By Simon A. Senzon

INTRODUCTION

Success, health, and happiness were at the heart of B.J. Palmer's (1882-1961) life and teachings. Palmer's epigrams, painted everywhere on the walls of his campus embody this. The epigrams represent the wisdom, insight, and humor of one of America's greatest geniuses and luminaries from the twentieth century.

The word epigram means, "upon-written." It was developed from the epitaph, which means, "upon a tomb." Epitaphs had to be short in order to be easily carved on walls, statues, and tombs. According to Hanor Webb, "epigrams are the oldest-also the newest-forms of concise comment." Epigrams can be funny, wise (as in proverbs or aphorisms or sayings), reverent or irreverent, simple or subtle.(1) There are few rules for what actually comprises an epigram. In modern times, epigrams are thought to have wit. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote,

What is an epigram? A dwarfish whole,

Its body brevity, and wit its soul.

The wit is often taken to be a sting at the end. William Walsh wrote,

An epigram should be – if right-

Short, simple, pointed, keen, and bright,

A lively little thing!

Like wasp with taper body – bound

By lines – not many, neat and round,

All ending in a sting.

Some epigrams are beautiful, elated, and honoring (without a sting). In Paul Nixon's classic book on the modern epigram, he concluded it may be solemn or savage, a love poem, or an elegy, amusing, moral, or philosophical. So long as it is brief, with some, "graceful, ingenious, pointed, weighty, witty, or satirical turn of thought to which it's preceding lines lead up."(2)

Palmer's use of epigrams can be traced to two of his early mentors, his father and Elbert Hubbard. One of the oldest books in his father D.D. Palmer's collection was titled, *The Moral Aphorisms and Terseological Teachings of Confucius: The Sapient Chinese Philosopher*.(3) B.J. started using epigrams to advertise by modeling Hubbard, founder of Roycrofters, an artist community in New York. Hubbard had a strong influence on B.J. in thought, dress, politics, and business. B.J. actually modeled his "prettiest printing plant in America" on Hubbard's.(4) Purple epigrams were painted on the walls of the Printery alongside the green plants and singing birds.(5) Later he modified some of Hubbard's epigrams and borrowed freely

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from others.(6,7) Palmer also included attributed epigrams liberally. Over 100 epigrams by other authors are reproduced in this volume. Palmer's epigrams from his book, *As a Man Thinketh*,(8) total 1,059 although the Palmer Campus reports there were close to 3,000 epigrams on the walls of all the buildings.(9)

As a Man Thinketh was originally published around 1921 and was 73 pages. The page numbers increased in each of five editions until the 1930s edition, where there were 129 pages. That edition was reproduced in 1952 as a chapter in Palmer's book, *Answers*, and in 1988 by the Delta Sigma Chi Fraternity.(10) I will make an educated guess that there was an addition of about 730 epigrams from 1920s to the 1930s. Considering Palmer's process for writing an epigram, "Give Us 30 Days and We'll Write a Book; 6 Months and We'll Write a Chapter; 1 Year and We'll Write an Epigram,"(11) writing 730 in about 20 years is tremendous!

According to one of Palmer's deans, Herbert Hender, *As A Man Thinketh* was written down because people were constantly copying the epigrams. Hender wrote, "Hundreds everywhere. B.J. believes in making bare walls work. Many people go about copying them in note books. In self-defense, he printed them in a book titled *As A Man Thinketh*."(12) Publishing the epigrams for profit was consistent with Palmer's entrepreneurial spirit. He wrote two successful books on advertising.(13)

Palmer's influence extended beyond his students and faculty. Napoleon Hill was a great proponent of affirmations and aphorisms, and one of the pioneers of success thinking in the last century. On his meeting with Palmer in the 1920s he wrote, "Here I found the most inspiring institution of any kind—bar none!—in America. Here I found MY teacher! A man who not only teaches about things, but how to do things. A man who embodies in his life and work the principles of living and doing, the fine "Art of selling Yourself. . ."(14) Hill was clearly inspired by Palmer.

Many of B.J.'s speeches such as "Selling Yourself" were "epigrams expanded upon."(15) From chiropractic's unique style of advertising to Palmer's charismatic approach to getting the message across, epigrams became a simple way to share his message.(16)

In the chapter following his 1952 reproduction of the epigrams, Palmer wrote,

Our endeavor in making idle, non-productive space work, was to explain the secrets and mysteries of how to get sick well; the same as it is our endeavor to make blank, bare walls of our buildings work, with epigrams which speak a language of action and a philosophy of life.(17)

At the core of these epigrams are kernels of truth, aspects of humanity, inspiration to strive to be better, to evolve, and to grow. Palmer used them to inspire his students and faculty to excel. In his introduction to the epigrams he wrote, "See it and you read it; read it and you think it; think it and it becomes you; becoming you, you are it – thus we build better, bigger, broader men and women."(18) The wider vision to create the book of epigrams was so the message, "may spread beyond those only who see." Thus it is not only for those walking the hallowed halls, or chiropractors and their patients, but for all. Epigrams continue to play a role as an inspiration for the chiropractic profession,(19) but these words put together by Palmer are designed to inspire anyone who seeks to be more, to step up, and to challenge themselves to follow their inner prompting to grow, to get closer to the divine, and to take decisive action.

The only problem with the original editions of these epigrams was that they were not organized. Gaining the wisdom from them was always hit or miss. An attempt to make them easier to access was made years

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ago in the form of an index but it relied on historical organization.(20) This edition is organized by topic. Each section is categorized according to general themes such as success, hard times, common sense, business, and wisdom. It is my hope that this organization will facilitate great insight and enlightenment for all who read them.

I have written introductions based on the theme of each chapter. The introductions are very brief and are designed to give you, the reader, a richer understanding of Palmer's perspective. Since the epigrams are generally from the 1920s and 1930s, I have included quotes from Palmer's later writings in the 1950s. This will help you to understand how Palmer developed and place the epigrams in a wider and deeper context.

The epilogue is a new essay, B.J. Palmer: An Integral Biography. It explores Palmer's life and the levels of consciousness he may have developed to. The article is based on an earlier epilogue from my first book, *The Spiritual Writings of B.J. Palmer*.(20) This incarnation of the essay has been through extensive peer-review for the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*.(21) There are some small changes from the article so it fits the book. The epilogue is an in-depth approach to examining Palmer's interior development and legacy.

Finally, BJ once wrote, "One of my epigrams is this—and ponder it well, "WHAT THE FELLOW IS, INSIDE, IS! WHAT THE FELLOW IS, INSIDE, WILL COME OUT SOONER OR LATER!"(22) May these epigrams assist you as they have thousands before you to come out soon from within and let shine the glorious essence you truly are.

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10. Special thanks to Glenda Weise for assisting in gathering these facts from the Palmer Library stacks. (Palmer was made honorary president of Delta Sigma Chi in 1913)
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